12
E.10.20

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE Scripture-Revelation, *As to the* Proof *of it.* PART II.

BIBL. CANT. ACAD.

TWO

SERMONS

Preach'd at the CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. *Paul*, *April* 1st. and *May* 6th. 1700.

BEING

The Fourth and Fifth, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL*, Rector of St. *Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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St. Luke XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he ſaid, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.

THE Point I entred upon the Proof of the laſt time was this,

(3.) That we have *ſufficient Reaſon* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and conſequently of all the Doctrines that are taught by it.

And for the Proof of this, having, for Brevity ſake, confined my Diſcourſe upon it to the *Books* of the *New Teſtament* only, (the rather becauſe the Authority of that being granted, the Authority of the *Old Teſtament* cannot reaſonably be queſtioned) I propounded to ſhew, 1. That we have *ſufficient Reaſon* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Teſtament* were written by thoſe *Perſons* who are ſaid to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to *them* in their *Relations* of thoſe *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded. And, 3. That if the Matters of Fact related in the *New Teſtament* are true, *they* are *ſufficient*

Proofs of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

And I hope enough was ſaid the laſt time, to ſhew that we have *ſufficient Reaſon* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Teſtament* were written by thoſe *Perſons* who are ſaid to be the *Authors* thereof. What I am next to do, is,

2. To ſhew that there is *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to theſe *Authors* in their *Relations* of thoſe *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded.

And I hope none of you that hear me (whom I preſume to be all *Chriſtians*) will take Offence at it, if now, while I am arguing this Point, I ſometimes ſpeak of the *Holy Evangeliſts* with the ſame Freedom that might be uſed in ſpeaking concerning any other Authors, and if I ſometimes Plead for no more Credit to be given to *them* in their Relations than is fit and reaſonable to be given to any other Hiſtorian that was naturally as well furniſhed and qualified to write a true Hiſtory as they were, and whoſe Fidelity and Veracity is as well atteſted and confirmed other Ways as theirs was. For you will conſider, I hope, that my Buſineſs is now with *Infidels*, with whom we can argue only upon the Principles of common Reaſon: And tho' *we* who are *Chriſtians* already, do believe, as one of the firſt Principles of our Religion, that theſe *Sacred Writers* were *divinely* and *ſupernaturally aſſiſted* in their Work, and that upon that Account they deſerve much greater Credit in what they have written than other Hiſtorians do; yet this is what thoſe who are yet *Infidels* will not allow; And in Diſputation nothing is to be preſumed on one ſide but what will be readily allowed by the other Party. So

that

that the *divine Inſpiration* of the *Evangelical Writers* and the *ſupernatural Aſſiſtance* which *we* believe they had in their Writing cannot as yet be regularly inſiſted upon as an Argument to gain them Credit; But it is what will eaſily be granted afterwards, when the Truth of their Hiſtory ſhall be well eſtabliſhed upon other Grounds; (as I hope it will be in the following Diſcourſe) and 'tis what may then ſerve to procure a *religious* Reſpect and Reverence to theſe Sacred Writings, and to ingage us to receive them *not as the Word of Men, but (as they are in Truth) as the Word of God.* 1 Theſſ. 2. 13.

But this one thing nevertheleſs I ſuppoſe I may preſume, *viz.* that if the Books of the *New Teſtament* (the Hiſtorical Parts of it in particular) were written by thoſe Authors to whom they are aſcribed (which has been already proved) the *Matters* of *Fact* recorded by the Evangeliſts in *Writing* are the *ſame* which they and the other Apoſtles teſtified by Word of Mouth in their *Preaching*; For it cannot, I think, with any Reaſon, be ſuſpected that their *Preaching* and *Writings* were *diſagreeable* to each other, becauſe ſuch Diſagreement would, moſt certainly, have utterly deſtroyed the Credit of them both.

And this being ſuppoſed, I hope, it will clearly appear that there is abundantly *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to theſe Writings, if theſe following things be conſidered; (1.) If we conſider the *Nature*, *Conditions* and *Circumſtances* of the *Matters* that are recorded in the *Hiſtorical Books* of the *New Teſtament*, and of the *Hiſtory* its ſelf. (2.) If we conſider the good *Capacity* that the *Authors* thereof were in to *know* the *Truth* of the things they have related. (3.) If we conſider

conſider the ſtrong *Obligations* they were under to write nothing but the *Truth*, according to the beſt of their Knowledge or Information. (4.) If we conſider the good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honeſty* and *Faithfulneſs*. And (5.) Laſtly, If we conſider the *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their Hiſtory by *God himſelf*.

1. I ſay the *Evangelical Hiſtory* will appear to be highly credible, if (without any Regard as yet had to the Ability and Integrity of its Authors) we only conſider the *Nature*, *Conditions* and *Circumſtances* of the *Matters* therein recorded, and of the *Hiſtory* its ſelf. Concerning which there are two things eſpecially that may be obſerved, 1. That the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are *ſuch* as might be *certainly known*. And 2. That they are *ſuch*, and in *ſuch manner related* by the *Evangeliſts*, that if their Hiſtory of them had been *falſe*, it could *never* have gained *Credit* in the World.

1. Firſt, I ſay the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are *ſuch* as might be *certainly known*; I mean, either by the *Hiſtorians* themſelves, or by *thoſe* from whom they had their Information. For,

1. They are, for the moſt part, plain *Matters* of *Senſe*, which thoſe who were preſent at them could have no *doubt* of without *Diſtruſting* their own Faculties of *Hearing* or *Seeing*; and which thoſe who teſtified them might be as *certain* of the Truth of, as *we* can be of any thing that we *hear* with our *own Ears*, or *ſee* with our *own Eyes*. For, thus, whether our Saviour *gave out* himſelf to be the *Meſſias* foretold by the *Prophets*; whether he *ſaid* that he was the *Son of God*; and whether he *uttered* thoſe other *Speeches* which

which the *Evangeliſts* have recorded as ſpoken by him, could not but be *certainly known* by the *People* who often heard him; and eſpecially by his *Apoſtles* who conſtantly attended him.

And ſo likewiſe whether he *did* thoſe many *wonderful Works* which the *Evangeliſts* have recorded of him could not but be *known* by *thoſe* that were *preſent* with him; They might be *certain* either that he *did* them, or that he did *not do* them. Thus for inſtance, it might be *certainly known* to *thoſe* that firſt affirmed that he gave Sight to the Blind, whether thoſe Perſons had been once blind, and whether afterwards they ſaw; and to *thoſe* that witneſſed that he gave Strength to the Cripples, whether the Men whom they ſaid he wrought this Cure upon, had been Lame or diſabled in their Feet, Hands, or Body before, and whether afterwards they walked and had Strength like other Men; and to *thoſe* that teſtified that he raiſed the Dead, whether the Perſons ſaid to have been raiſed by him, had been truly dead, and whether afterwards they lived.

But above all, his own *Reſurrection* (which the preſent Seaſon as well as the Wonderfulneſs and Importance of the thing obliges us to have a ſpecial Regard to) was a thing that might be moſt *certainly known* to *thoſe* that pretended to be *Witneſſes* of it; they might be *certain* whether he had been once *dead*, and whether *he ſhewed himſelf alive after his Paſſion by many infallible Proofs, and was ſeen of them forty Days.* Of *this* they might be rather *more certain* than of any other of his Miracles, becauſe it was a thing not to be judged of by *one ſenſe* only (as ſome of the reſt were) but by almoſt *all* their *Senſes*; for by their

This Sermon was Preached on the Monday *in* Eaſter *Week.*

Sight

Sight they might be aſſured that it was he himſelf whom for more than three Years before they had been well acquainted with, whom they then ſaw with their Eyes; and by their *Hearing*, that it was his own *Voice* and not a Stranger's, that Voice which they had often heard, and which they well knew, that then ſpake to them; and by their *Touch*, that it was a *real Body* which they *ſaw* and *heard*, and not an *airy Apparition*; not a *meer Voice*: and alſo that it was *that* very *ſame Body*, which they had ſeen before hanging upon, and which they had taken down dead from the Croſs, when they were permitted (as they ſay they were) *to handle* and feel him, to *put their Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and to thruſt their Hands into* the Gaſh that had been made in *his Side* by the Spear that pierced his Heart.

Luke 24. 39.
Joh. 20. 27.

And of the *other Matters* recorded by the *Evangeliſts*, but not as Matters of their own Knowledge, *thoſe* from whom they had their Information might have the *ſame Certainty* which *they* had of theſe things. For his *Mother* could not but *know* whether ſhe had conceived him without Knowledge of a Man; and whether his Birth had been foretold her by an Angel; And *ſhe*, and *her Relations*, and the whole *Neighbourhood* might have a *certain Knowledge* of the Time, Place, and all other Circumſtances of his Birth as they are related in the Goſpels.

They that teſtified ſuch plain *Matters* of *Senſe* as moſt of thoſe are, which are recorded in the *Evangelical Hiſtory*, could not but know either that the things which they teſtified were true, or that they themſelves were egregious Liars when they teſtified them to have been ſo.

2. As

2. As the Matters recorded in the *Evangelical History* are chiefly Matters of ſenſe; of which, as ſuch, the greateſt Certainty and Aſſurance may be had; and in which any ſingle Witneſs thereof may be very confident that he is not miſtaken; ſo it may be alſo obſerv'd, that moſt of them are related as *Matters done* in the Sight, Hearing, or Preſence of a *great many*; which *Circumſtance* adds very much to that *Certainty* which any ſingle Witneſs of ſuch Matters may receive by his own Senſes only.

For tho' it be a common Saying, that *Seeing is Believing*, and we ordinarily deſire no greater Aſſurance of the Truth of any Matter of Senſe, than our own Senſe and Perception of it; it is nevertheleſs no unuſual thing for a Man when he is relating ſomewhat that happen'd that was very extraordinary and ſurprizing, to ſay, that tho' he ſaw it himſelf, he could hardly believe his own Eyes. And this might well enough have been the Caſe of any one of the Witneſſes of any of our Lord's Miracles, (and eſpecially of his *Reſurrection* the moſt wonderful of all his Miracles, and which gave Confirmation to all the reſt;) for tho' they were plain Matters of Senſe, yet they were withal ſo very *ſtrange* and *aſtoniſhing*, that if any Man had ſeen them *alone*, he might probably have had ſome *Diſtruſt* even of his *own Senſes*, or he might afterwards have been ready to *doubt* whether he had been well *awake* or in a *Dream*. But a Man cannot ſo reaſonably ſuſpect that his own Senſes do deceive him, when he perceives that the thing appears to *all* others that are preſent, juſt as it does to him; nor can he afterwards ſo eaſily fancy that he was in a Dream, when

he finds that *all* the reſt that were there have the ſame Notion and Remembrance of the thing that he himſelf has. So that by this *Additional Evidence*, I mean by the *Agreement* that a Man finds there is between his own ſenſes and other Mens, he becomes *more certain* and *confident* of the Truth of the things he ſees, than he would have been by his *own Eye-ſight* only.

2. Secondly; The other thing which I ſaid might be noted concerning the *Matters* Recorded in the *Evangelical Hiſtory*, is, That they are *ſuch*, and in *ſuch manner* related by the *Evangeliſts*; that if their Hiſtory of them had been *falſe*, it could *never* have gained *Credit* in the World.

And this may in part appear from what has been ſaid already; For as there is nothing that can be more certainly known and atteſted than a plain *Matter* of *Senſe* at which *ſeveral* are *preſent*; ſo there is nothing more *liable* to be *contradicted* and *eaſie* to be *diſproved* than *ſuch* a *Matter* is, in caſe it was not ſo done as 'tis reported to have been.

But there are ſeveral other things that are here proper to be conſidered; for,

1. It may be conſidered that the *Goſpel Hiſtory* comprehends a very *great number* of Relations of ſuch Matters of Fact and Senſe; Conſidering therefore how very eaſie it was to diſprove *every one* of them if it had been *falſe*; 'tis, moſt evidently, morally impoſſible that a Hiſtory *ſtuffed* with nothing elſe but *Lyes* and *Forgeries* of this ſort, (as they muſt ſuppoſe the *Evangelical Hiſtory* to be, who will not allow it to be a true Hiſtory) ſhould ever have obtained any Credit. And moſt of the things recorded by

by the *Evangeliſts*, being related by them as *Matters* of their *own Knowledge*; if the *Falſity* of only one ſingle Relation had been made appear, the *Credit* of the *whole* Hiſtory would have been thereby *deſtroyed*.

2. It may be alſo conſidered that all theſe things are related in the *Goſpel Hiſtory* as done in that *ſame Country* in which the Hiſtory thereof was firſt publiſhed; and *that* a Country but of *ſmall Extent*, not above two hundred Miles in length at the moſt, and not half ſo much in breadth; and yet not all in the ſame part of it, but ſome in *one* place, ſome in *another*; and thoſe uſually the moſt *conſiderable* Towns or Cities of *Judea* and *Galilee*. And *by this*, their Hiſtory of theſe things, if it had been falſe, was ſtill more eaſie and liable to be diſproved; there being very few of thoſe to whom theſe Matters were firſt related that needed to have gone many Miles from Home to have enquired into the Truth of ſome or other of them. And if any Man had found the *Apoſtles* falſe in their Report of any Matter that was ſaid to have been done in his own Neighbourhood, he would hardly have gone farther for more ſatisfaction; he would readily have concluded without further Examination, that being found *Falſe Witneſſes* in *one* thing, they were not fit to be believed in any thing.

3. It may be moreover conſidered, that the *Goſpel Hiſtory* was written and publiſhed in a *few years* after the things therein Recorded are ſaid to be done. It is not certain indeed in what Year preciſely the *Goſpels* were written; But if they are but allowed to be the genuine Writings of the reputed Authors;

(which I hope has been already ſufficiently prov'd) 'tis certain they were all, (even the lateſt of them, that of St. *John*) written before the Memory of the Things therein recorded could be worn out; nay if we further ſuppoſe (as I think we may do very reaſonably) that the Things recorded by the *Evangeliſts* are the *ſame* which they and the other *Apoſtles* and Diſciples of our Lord teſtified by word of Mouth in their Preaching, we may truly enough ſay that the *Hiſtory* of the *Goſpel* was begun to be publiſhed on that *ſame Day* on which the Apoſtles began to preach, *viz.* on the *Day* of *Pentecoſt*, ten Days after our Lords Aſcenſion; and that it was fully publiſhed in a very ſhort time after. So that moſt of the things recorded in the *Goſpels* are things that had been done or had happened in the compaſs of leſs than *four* Years before the Hiſtory thereof was firſt publiſhed, for it was not ſo long from our Lord's *Baptiſm* to his *Aſcenſion*; and the earlieſt things of all that are therein recorded (which are but few, and make but a ſmall part of the Hiſtory) *viz.* the Birth of St. *John Baptiſt*, and of our *Lord*, and the things that happened about that Time, were things done not above thirty five Years before at the moſt.

And the *Hiſtory* of the *Acts of the Apoſtles* (which becauſe it ends with St. *Paul*'s Impriſonment at *Rome*, we may reaſonably think was publiſhed about that Time) comprehends a Hiſtory of ſome very remarkable things, the very *firſt* and earlieſt whereof had not been done thirty Years before.

And this Conſideration affords another very probable Argument of the *Truth* of the *Evangelical Hiſtory*; becauſe by this it ſtill further appears how very

very easie it would have been to have disproved it if it had been false; for it being an History of things done so very *lately*, it must needs be that several of those into whose Hands it first came, must have *certain Knowledge* whether some of the things therein related had been so or not; And they who had not this *Knowledge*, might easily have had *certain Information*, (from others, I mean, besides the *Apostles* and Disciples of our Lord) whether the Relations therein contained were true or false.—— Especially if it be considered further, in the *4th* Place.

4. That the Facts related in the *Evangelical History* are commonly related with all the *Circumstances* that were needful or proper to be noted in order to the rendring an Enquiry into the truth of them exceeding easie to such as had any distrust thereof. For in the Account which the *Evangelists* give us of our Saviour's *Speeches*, they commonly tell us not only his Words, but likewise *when*, *where*, *to whom*, and *upon what Occasion* they were spoken; and in the Account that they give of his *Miracles*, they usually note the *Places* where they were done, and very often the *Names*, or *Characters* at least, of the *Persons* they were wrought upon, and sometimes they mention also *who* were by and Witnesses thereof, and what *Discourse* concerning him was thereby occasioned; And in relating the things that were done or happened before our Saviour's Baptism, about the Time of his Birth, they carefully note the *Time*, the *Place*, and other *Circumstances*, whereby their *Readers* were (as it were) *challenged* to make Enquiry, and *desired* not to take things only upon *their Credit*; and were also *directed* readily *whither* to go, and *to whom* to apply themselves

themſelves to obtain the fulleſt ſatisfaction whether the things they reported were ſo or not. And if all the Circumſtances of every particular Story which they relate are not always ſo punctually ſet down, the Omiſſion thereof ſometimes is not of much Conſideration, becauſe it was ſo very eaſie by enquiring into the Truth of thoſe many other Stories which are related with all Circumſtances for any Perſon to be ſatisfied whether their Hiſtory in general deſerv'd Credit or not; And whoever had found any *one* Story falſly reported by them, would hardly have troubled himſelf, (at leaſt not for his own ſatisfaction) to have examined further into the Truth of the reſt.

The ſame may be obſerved in the *Acts of the Apoſtles.*

5. It may be further conſider'd that moſt of the things recorded by the *Evangeliſts* are related by them as things that were *done* very *publickly*, as things that were *well known* to a *great many*. For very few in Compariſon of thoſe *Diſcourſes* of our Lord that are recorded by the *Evangeliſts* were addreſs'd in private to his *Apoſtles* only, but moſt of them were ſpoken in publick; his ſet Sermons commonly to great *multitudes* gathered together on a *Mountain*, on the *Seaſhore*, or in a *Synagogue*; and the reſt more commonly in *Places* of *Reſort*, in populous Towns or Cities, in *Jeruſalem* or the *Temple*, when many were by to hear what he ſaid. And his *Miracles* were *done* for the moſt part in the beſt Inhabited Cities of *Judea* and *Galilee*; or if in other Places, yet in the open Day-light, and commonly when there was a great croud of People about him; Or if at any time the Miracle its ſelf was done privately, in an Houſe, or a Chamber, the *Effect* of the Miracle was uſually very *viſible*, and ſuch as could not but be taken notice of by

by a great many. And even of thoſe few things which were ſpoken or done by him moſt privately, there was *no want* of Witneſſes; there being (except very rarely) no fewer than *twelve* in conſtant Attendance upon him, and *ſeveral* others beſides that *Companied with them all the time that the Lord Jeſus went in and out among them.* Acts 1. 21.

And *this Circumſtance* of the *Facts* recorded by the *Evangeliſts*, as it made them capable of better and more certain Atteſtation, being true; ſo it contributed no leſs towards the rendring it eaſie to diſprove that Relation which they had given of them, if it had been falſe. For when a Man witneſſes a thing of his own private Knowledge there may be no way to invalidate his Teſtimony, but either by ſhewing that the thing which he teſtifies was not poſſible, or by offering ſome juſt Exception to the Credit of the Witneſs; But when neither of theſe can be done (and they cannot always be done altho' the thing teſtified be falſe) yet in caſe the Matter was done publickly, it is the eaſieſt thing in the World to convict a falſe Witneſs by the *contrary Teſtimony* of ſeveral others that were preſent and as capable of knowing the Truth of the thing as himſelf; or by the *Claſhing* of the *Witneſſes* among themſelves. Nothing therefore could have been more eaſie than to have diſproved the *Evangelical Hiſtory* in almoſt every particular of it, if it had not been true.

For moſt of our Saviour's Speeches and Miracles are related as ſpoken and done in the Preſence not of his Diſciples only, but of a great many others that *happened* to be by, by *Chance*, or that followed him, not for any Liking that they had to his Perſon or Doctrine,

Doctrine, but only out of *Curiosity*, or *for the Sake of the Loaves*; and very often they were done before such as came on purpose to *watch* what he said and did, with a Design to lay hold on any Occasion that was offer'd to represent him to the People as an *Impostor*. Can it be suppos'd then that these were ignorant whether the Relation which the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* gave of these Matters was true or false? Or can it be imagin'd that they would all have held their Peace? that not one, of those many that could have done it, would have opened his Mouth to have convicted the *Apostles* of Falsity, if they had either in Word or Writing related any one of these things otherwise than it had indeed been transacted? And if in any one of these things, of which the Apostles pretended they had personal Knowledge, they had been found *false Witnesses*, their *Credit* would have been *ruin'd* for ever.

Nay if they had been found false in their Report of any of those *other Matters* which they have left upon Record, of which they had not a personal Knowledge; tho' this indeed wou'd not have been such a Proof of their Dishonesty (for any Man may very innocently be mis-inform'd) it wou'd however have been such a plain Argument of their *foolish Credulity*, as would have *destroy'd* their *Credit* no less than if they had been found in a known Lye. For these also were Matters of the same *publick Nature*; nay indeed they were rather more *publick* than the other; they were so very publick that any Man with very small Trouble might have been fully satisfied whether they were so or not.

For

For thus, they tell us that our *Lord* was of the *Seed* of *David*; (and it was a Matter of the greateſt Conſequence to the Chriſtian Religion that he ſhould be known to be ſo;) How very eaſie was it at that time, when the *Genealogies* of *all* the Jewiſh *Families*, and of the *Family* of *David* more eſpecially, were kept with the greateſt Careſulneſs and Exactneſs for *them* to know this? And how very eaſie was it, for any one that doubted it, to have inſpected the publick Regiſters, and ſeen whether it was ſo or not?

They tell us alſo ſeveral *Circumſtances* of our *Lord's* *Birth*, and ſeveral *Accidents* that happened about that time; They tell us, for inſtance, that *Joſeph* being of the *Houſe* and *Lineage* of *David*, was forced with *Mary* his Wife, at a very inconvenient time for her, being *great with Child*, to take a long Journey of about an hundred Miles, from *Nazareth* in *Galilee*, where their Habitation then was, to *Bethlehem* in *Judea*, the *City of David*, that ſo their Names might be *enrolled* with the reſt of the Family of *David*, when *Auguſtus Cæſar* had ordered a general Enrolment of the whole *Jewiſh Nation*; they tell us that then and there *Jeſus* was born; that at the time of his Birth certain *Wiſe Men out of the Eaſt*, conducted by a *Star*, came to *Judea* in Queſt of the *Meſſias*; that *they* informed *Herod* of the Deſign of their coming; that they were directed by the *Council* of the *Chief Prieſts* and *Scribes* to look for him in *Bethlehem*; that *Herod* diſappointed of the Deſign he had to kill this new-born *King* of the *Jews*, by their not returning back to him according to his Appointment, *ſent forth, and*, that he might make ſure work of it, *ſlew all the Children in Bethlehem that were under two years old*; and

Luke 2. 1. &c.

Mat. 2. 1, &c.

several other things they tell us of the like kind, easie to be known if true, and no less easie to be disproved if false; for whether there had been such a * *Taxing* or Enrolment of the *whole Nation* of the *Jews* according to their *Families*, by the Order of the Emperor, could not but be *well known* to all the *Jews*; And the People of *Nazareth* could not but *know* when *Joseph* went from thence, and whither he went, and upon what Occasion, and how long it was before he returned; and the *People* at *Jerusalem* could not but long *remember* the Story of the *Wise Men*, at whose coming *Herod* and the whole City with him was so much *troubled*; and if there had been no such thing, would readily have contradicted the Apostle's Relation of it; And the *Mothers* at *Bethlehem* which survived the Loss of their dear Children, could never after while they lived *forget* that *general Mourning* there had once been amongst them, nor the *Occasion* of it. If therefore these and such like things related by the *Evangelists* as things *publickly* done, and much talked of, and of which (as they say) the Rumour was spread far and near, had not been so as they are related, their *whole History* would have been thereby so much *disparaged*, that no part of it would ever have had much Credit.

* Ἀπογραφή.

'Tis true indeed there are some things related by the *Evangelists* that were not altogether so *publick* as those I have before mentioned, for there are some things, of which (according to the Account that is given of them in the *Evangelical History*) none but the *Disciples* of Christ were Witnesses; such in particular was the *Resurrection* of *our Lord*, which we at this time commemorate; and which is for that Reason

ſon moſt proper to be now inſtanced in. Of *this* then I ſay (as well as of ſome few other things) it muſt be granted, that it was a Fact that could directly be witneſſed only by his own *Friends*, by his *Apoſtles* and *Diſciples*; for ſo St. *Peter* obſerves, ſpeaking of this Matter, *Acts* x. 40, 41. *Him God raiſed up the third Day, and ſhewed him openly, not to all the People, but to Witneſſes choſen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he roſe from the Dead.* But nevertheleſs, conſidering *how long*, and *how often*, he is reported to have *appeared* to them, and the many *Circumſtances* that are noted concerning his *ſeveral Apparitions*, and the great *Number* of thoſe whom he is ſaid to have *appeared to*, (for St. *Paul* affirms that beſides his frequent Apparitions to his Apoſtles, *he was ſeen at once by above five hundred Brethren*) their Teſtimony in this Matter, if it had been falſe, was very near as eaſie and liable to be diſproved, as in any of the Matters before ſpoken of. For it is very hard for ſo much as *two Men* that are hired, or agree together to give in a falſe Evidence, to be ſo well inſtructed in the Evidence they are to give, or to concert the Matter ſo well between themſelves, but that upon a *ſeparate Examination* their Falſity may eaſily be detected by their *Diſagreement* in ſome conſiderable Circumſtances of the Matter they bear Witneſs to; How very much eaſier then would it have been to have done this, in a Matter cloathed with ſuch great *variety* of Circumſtances, and that was teſtified by *ſo many*, by Twelve, by Seventy, by *above five hundred Perſons*.

1 Cor. 15. 6.

Or if it can be ſuppoſed, that they might have all ſo fully agreed beforehand, in what Manner and with what Circumſtances to tell this Story, that it might not be poſſible to *catch* them in a *Contradiction*; yet the thing it ſelf was of that Nature, that the falſe Evidence they had given concerning it (if it had been falſe) might eaſily have been ſhewn other ways, for what they teſtified was that that *ſame Jeſus* whom the *Jews* had Crucified, and whom they had ſeen laid into the Sepulchre was riſen again, and had been ſeen alive three Days after his Paſſion by ſeveral of his Diſciples; Had this therefore been falſe, how very eaſie would it have been for the *Jews* to have diſproved their Evidence of it, by only going to the Sepulchre, and taking out thence his *dead Body*, and *expoſing* it for ſome time to *publick view*? And thither doubtleſs they did go, and with this Deſign; but the Body they could not find, and yet they had taken all the
Mat. 27. 62. Caution that was poſſible to prevent its being conveyed away, having obtain'd from *Pilate* a Guard of Soldiers on purpoſe to keep watch over it for three Days. This therefore is a ſtrong Confirmation of the Truth of the *Apoſtle's* Teſtimony concerning our Lord's *Reſurrection*, that it being ſuch as might with the greateſt Eaſe in the World have been diſproved if it had been falſe; the *Jews* had nothing to ſay againſt it, nothing to oppoſe to it, but only that very ill
Mat. 28. 13. contrived, that ſelf-contradicting Evidence of the Watchmen; who ſaid that *while they were aſleep*, that is, when all their ſenſes were bound up, and when they were not in a Capacity of knowing any thing that was done, *the Diſciples came and ſtole the Body away*. But if they *ſaw* the Body remov'd (in which Caſe

Caſe only they could be good Witneſſes of it) they were not, as they ſaid they were, *aſleep* when the thing was done; Or if indeed they were *aſleep*, when it was removed, they could not be poſitive *how* it was *removed*, they could not ſay he was *not riſen* from the Dead.

6. Another thing that may be conſider'd in order to ſhew how very improbable, or rather how impoſſible it was that the *Goſpel Hiſtory* ſhould ever have gained Credit in the World if it had been falſe, is this; that as it was a Hiſtory of ſuch Matters and was ſo contrived that it might with the greateſt Eaſe have been diſproved, ſo the Matters therein related were in *themſelves*, and eſpecially in their *Conſequences*, *ſuch* as muſt needs have *engaged* a great many to *make* the *ſtricteſt Examination* that was poſſible into the Truth of them; and if they had diſcovered any thing of Falſhood therein, to *make known* their *Diſcovery* to the World.

For the whole *Doctrine* of *Chriſtianity* was grounded upon the Truth of the *Evangelical Hiſtory*; *This* diſprov'd would have deſtroy'd *that*, and *this* being admitted, there was no way to put a ſtop to the ſpreading of *that*; And the certain *Conſequence* of receiving the Chriſtian Religion in the World, was the Aboliſhing of all the other Forms of Religion that were then any where receiv'd or eſtabliſh'd; even of *that* which had been introduc'd by *Moſes* amongſt the *Jews*, by the Appointment of God himſelf, as well as of the ſeveral ſorts of *Paganiſm* and *Idolatry* that were receiv'd in other Countries. Now when any *Religion*, be it true or falſe, is the *eſtabliſh'd Religion* of a Country, there muſt needs be a great many engaged

gaged by the ſtrongeſt Worldly Intereſt to ſupport and maintain it. For it was not only at *Epheſus* that
Acts 19. 24, &c. a great number of *Craftsmen* got their *Wealth* by making *Silver Shrines* for *Diana*, but in every other Country the *Living* of a conſiderable Number *depended* upon the *Religion* that was therein receiv'd; which being deſtroy'd, and their *Trade* or Profeſſion thereby at an End, they muſt of neceſſity be hard put to it to get Bread by taking up ſome new Employment. And beſides, there is nothing that *all Men*, of what Trade or Profeſſion ſoever they are, are generally ſo zealous and concern'd about, nothing that they are ſo afraid of any Change or Innovation in, as *Religion*; *This*, be it well or weakly grounded, yet if it be that Form of Religion that they have receiv'd from their Fathers, and been bred up in from their Childhood, they will not eaſily let go.

So that I ſaid too little, when I ſaid before that a *great many* muſt needs have been engaged to ſet themſelves to diſcover the Falſity of the *Evangelical Hiſtory*; for this was in truth the common Concern of *all Mankind*, except only of thoſe few Perſons who had been Inſtructed by our Saviour, and believed him to be the *Chriſt*; All others, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, Rich or Poor, Learned or Ignorant, Prieſts or People, were engaged either by *Intereſt*, or *Prejudice*, or *Conſcience*, or upon ſome other Account to convict the *Apoſtles* of Falſhood in their Relation of the Matters contain'd in the *Evangelical Hiſtory*; and if any Falſhood had been therein, it is impoſſible, (conſidering how obvious it muſt needs lie to Diſcovery, and how many were at Work to find it out) that they could

could have failed of their Aim; And if any one had made the Diſcovery, it can't be imagin'd he would have been long before he had imparted to others a Piece of News ſo very welcome as that would have been to the Generality of Mankind; or that ſuch a Diſcovery of the Falſity of the *Goſpel Hiſtory*, in any one particular, once made and publiſh'd ſhould ever after have been ſtifled or ſuppreſs'd; becauſe the ſame Reaſons that put them at firſt upon making the Diſcovery, were of the ſame Force afterwards to engage them to preſerve the Memory of any Diſcovery of that kind that had been made.

And therefore I add, in the laſt Place; And 'tis that which gives Weight and Strength to all that has been ſaid before upon this Subject, and fully compleats that Argument which I am now upon for the Proof of the Truth of the *Goſpel Hiſtory*.

7. That notwithſtanding the Eaſineſs of the Diſproof of this Hiſtory if it had been falſe, and the inceſſant Endeavours of the Adverſaries of Chriſtianity, to find out ſome Falſhood therein, (to do which they were not only prompted by their own Intereſt and Inclination, but alſo frequently and boldly challenged by the *Chriſtians* themſelves, as may be ſeen in the ancient *Apologies* for the Chriſtian Faith) it is nevertheleſs a *Hiſtory* of very *good Credit* now (cavilled at perhaps, but not denied, not pretended to be diſproved either by *Jews* or *Mahometans*, or any other ſort of *Infidels*) and that it has been of the like good Credit for many Hundred Years paſt, even ever ſince the firſt Publication of it; and that 'tis not ſo much as *contradicted* in any Point, by any other *Hiſtorian* that living in or near the Time of its Writing, was in

in a Capacity to contradict it upon good Grounds; *viz.* upon either certain Knowledge of his own, or very credible Information from others that any Matter therein had been falſly related.

True, perhaps the *Infidels* will ſay, There is indeed no Hiſtory of competent Antiquity *now* extant, by which the *Goſpel Hiſtory* can be diſproved; but that there has been no ſuch Hiſtory cannot with certainty be affirmed. This therefore (ſay they) is our Unhappineſs, that tho' we have a good Cauſe we are deſtitute of Means to ſupport it; and are in the Condition that the *Iſraelites* are ſaid to have been in in the
1 Sam. 13. 22. Days of *Saul*, when they had War with the *Philiſtins*; *It came to paſs in the Day of Battel there was neither Sword nor Spear found in the hand of any of the People.* But what was the Reaſon of this? Why, the
Ver. 19. *Philiſtins* had diſarmed them; they had taken away the Weapons they had before, and would not permit more to be made. And this, ſay the *Infidels*, is exactly our Caſe; In the *War* we have now with the *Chriſtians* we are forc'd to fight *without Sword or Spear*; And tho' for other good Reaſons we are confident the *Goſpel Hiſtory* is falſe, and are reſolved never to believe it, and make no doubt but that in former times it has been oppoſed and contradicted; yet in this the *Chriſtians* have been too hard and too cunning for us; that while they have kept their own Weapons they have ſlily taken away ours; for they have been careful to preſerve the ancient Books that were written by thoſe of their own Party in Defence of their Superſtition, but the *Books* of their *Adverſaries* they have been as careful to *ſuppreſs* and *deſtroy*; And they have had ſuch good ſucceſs in it, that of all the

Books

Books or *Diſcourſes* of the ancient *Champions* of *Judaiſm*, *Paganiſm* or *Deiſm* (*Trypho*, *Celſus*, *Porphyry*, *Julian*, and other great Names) *not much* is now *remaining* beſides *Fragments* (and thoſe perhaps imperfectly or falſly cited) to be picked up out of the Books of thoſe who have written Anſwers to them, who, we may well preſume, took notice only of thoſe Paſſages therein which they thought were eaſieſt to be anſwer'd. But this is no unuſual thing, for the powerful and prevailing Party to *ſtifle* that *Evidence* which they know not how to diſprove, and to *ſuppreſs* thoſe *Books* which they cannot anſwer. And this, ſay they, we take for a good Argument that there was ſomething very conſiderable in theſe Books, and not eaſily to be anſwer'd, becauſe otherwiſe the *Chriſtians* of former times would have been more willing that they ſhould be preſerv'd and tranſmitted to after times, that ſo Poſterity upon a fair Hearing of all that had been ſaid on both ſides, might be able to paſs a right Judgment upon the Caſe, and either to chuſe or to reject the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, with Prudence and Diſcretion.

This is what has been ſometimes ſuggeſted by the Enemies of our Religion; and indeed I know not what elſe can well be ſaid to invalidate that Proof of the *Goſpel Hiſtory* which I am now upon. But what ſlender ground there is for this Suggeſtion, and how very little the Chriſtian Cauſe is affected by it, a few Words will ſuffice to ſhow.

For, 1. Whereas 'tis ſaid, that tho' indeed there are no Hiſtories now in being whereby the *Goſpel Hiſtory* can be diſproved, 'tis poſſible however there may have formerly been *ſeveral Narratives* extant

that were perfectly contradictory to it, and those too perhaps better attested and confirmed than the *Gospel History* was; To this I answer; That tis never allow'd to be a good Proof that a thing is, to say that 'tis *possible* it might be. And besides, if this surmize or suggestion of a thing barely possible be a good Objection against the *Gospel History*, it is as much an Objection against all other ancient Histories; If for this Reason the *Gospel History* be not credible, no other History is so; for there is no ancient History in the World now extant, which we can be sure was never contradicted by some other, as ancient History, that is not extant.

But, 2. As there is no Evidence that the *Gospel History* was contradicted when it was first publish'd, that is, when, if it had been false, it might most easily have been disprov'd; so there is on the other Side, as good *Evidence* as such a Matter is capable of, that it never was thus *contradicted* or *disproved*; Because if the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History* had been then denied or disproved by any competent and credible Witnesses, 'tis impossible that the Christian Doctrine, which was grounded upon and chiefly established by these Facts, should ever have spread so fast as by the Confession of all Parties it did, from the time that it began to be preached by the *Apostles*. Nothing but the strong Evidence that there was of the Truth of the *Gospel History* (and strong it cannot be accounted, if there was stronger and better Evidence on the other side) could have supported the Profession of Christianity, (when it had nothing to recommend it self by but its Purity and Truth) against that violent Opposition which it met with every where in the World. And, 3.

And, 3. Whereas 'tis further ſuggeſted, that the Loſs of thoſe ancient Books which are ſuppoſed to have been written to diſprove the *Goſpel Hiſtory*, is owing to the Power and Subtlety of the *Chriſtians* of thoſe early times, who thought it beſt to *ſtifle* that *Evidence* which they could not gainſay or refute; this Suggeſtion is manifeſtly as groundleſs as 'tis malicious.

For many Books of all ſorts and of all ſides, have periſh'd by *Accident*, or been worn out by *Time*, without any formal Deſign of any Party or Perſons to ſuppreſs and deſtroy them; And I ſee no Reaſon why theſe *Books* written in *contradiction* to the *Goſpel Hiſtory* (if indeed any ſuch were ever written) may not have periſhed one of theſe ways as well as many other Books have done.

Or if a *Reaſon* muſt needs be given why ſome Books (and why theſe in particular) have been loſt, while others of the ſame or greater Antiquity have been preſerv'd; I think the *little Value* that Men generally had for thoſe Books that are loſt, is the beſt Reaſon that can be given why they were ſuffered to periſh; and that the moſt probable Cauſe of Mens having ſo little value for them, was becauſe the *Matter* of them was ſo evidently *falſe*, or the *Reaſoning* of them ſo manifeſtly *weak* and *fallacious*, that no Man thought it worth his while to be at the Pains or Charge of getting them tranſcribed.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with will not allow this to be a good Account of the Loſs of ſuch very *valuable Books* as they think theſe *Anti-Goſpel Hiſtories* were, let them find out a better; But I'm ſure that *that* before ſuggeſted by them, *viz.* that it was

by *Design*; the first *Christians* purposely *abolishing* and *destroying* all *Testimonies* and *Records* that made against them, is a much worse Account of it, and infinitely more improbable than that which I have given.

For it must be supposed either that these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were written very *early*, as soon almost as the *Gospel History* was published by the Preaching or Writing of the *Apostles*, or else in *after Times*; And if they were *destroyed* by the *Christians*, this must have been done, either *soon after* they were written, or else after they had been for *some time* receiv'd and allow'd as true Histories by the Adversaries of the Christian Faith.

Now if it be suppos'd that these Books were not written till a *good while after* the *Apostles* had preach'd, and the *Evangelists* written the *Gospel*; they were written *too late* to be of sufficient Authority to weaken the Credit of the *Gospel-History*: For how could those that were not *born* when the things recorded in the Gospel were said to be done, pretend to contradict the Testimony of those who were *living* at that time, and who testified either that they saw them with their *own Eyes*, or that they receiv'd that Account of them which they publish'd from very *credible Persons*, who said they had been *Eye witnesses* thereof?

But if it be supposed that these Books were written *sooner*, even as soon almost as the *Evangelists* wrote, or the *Apostles* began to publish, by their Preaching, the *Gospel History*; then I say 'tis impossible they should be *suppress'd* and *destroy'd* by the *Christians*, either *then*, or *afterwards*.

Not *then*; for tho' we grant that Christianity from

from the very firſt Preaching of it, made a very ſwift Progreſs in the World; and from a Beginning no bigger than a Grain of Muſtard-ſeed, grew up quickly to be a goodly Tree, ſhadowing many Nations under the Branches of it; yet it did not *ſpring up* like a *Muſhroom* in a *Night*; it did not *grow* to this *Bigneſs* all *at once*. And what were the *Chriſtians* in the weak and infant ſtate of the Church, but an Handful of Men in Compariſon with their numberleſs Oppoſers, and thoſe too without *Wealth*, without *Power*, of no *Intereſt* or *Eſteem* in the World; that they ſhould undertake to *corrupt* or *ſtifle* the *Evidence* that was given againſt them, which was *ſupported* by the *Secular Power*, and gladly receiv'd and *embrac'd* by all *other Men* but themſelves? What were they, that they ſhould be able to *call in* all the *Books* that had been written againſt them, and to *ſuppreſs* and *deſtroy* them at their pleaſure? and that too ſo *fully* and *effectually*, as that with the Books themſelves which they deſtroy'd, all *Memory* of them ſhould likewiſe *periſh*? A powerful and prevailing Party, with the Government on its ſide, may indeed do much in this kind, and yet hardly ſo much as this; But they that believe the *Chriſtians* to have been ſuch a *powerful* and *prevailing Party early enough* to hinder the ſpreading and diſperſing of any Books that were written againſt them, believe without any Ground or Warrant from Hiſtory, a more unaccountable and incredible thing than any that is recorded in the Goſpel.

But if this could not be done then, it might perhaps be done *afterwards*; For in progreſs of Time 'tis certain (it may be ſaid) that the *Chriſtians* did come to be of very great *Power* and *Intereſt*, and able to

bear

bear down all their *Oppoſers*; and 'tis likely enough that *then* they might ſet themſelves to *deſtroy* all thoſe Monuments of Antiquity whereby their *fabulous Goſpels* had been contradicted and diſprov'd; And 'tis not incredible that they ſhould ſo far ſucceed in their Attempt as to leave no means to Poſterity to diſcern how weak and ſandy a Foundation their Religion was built upon.

But this Suppoſition (taking it altogether) involves a greater Difficulty, and ſuppoſes a greater Miracle than the former did. For whatever the *Chriſtians* might attempt to do, or whatever they might be able to do, after they had attained to ſuch great Power, and were become the moſt numerous and prevailing Party; 'tis utterly incredible that they ever could have attained to ſuch great Power, that they ever could have become the moſt numerous and prevailing Party, if indeed the *Goſpel Hiſtory* had almoſt from the very Beginning, been oppoſed and contradicted by other Hiſtories that were more credible than the *Goſpel-Hiſtory* was.

For it muſt be, and is granted by all, that at the firſt Preaching of Chriſtianity all worldly Power and Intereſt were on the other ſide, and engaged moſt ſtrongly to hinder the Growth and ſpreading of it. Now when *Truth* is on one ſide, and *Power* and *Intereſt* on the other, 'tis not impoſſible that *Truth* may at laſt prevail againſt *Intereſt*, and bring the *Power* alſo to be of its ſide; But if *Truth* (I mean that which hath moſt Appearance of Truth, I ſay if Truth) and *Power* and *Intereſt* are all on the ſame ſide from the Beginning (as, it muſt be allowed, they were, by thoſe who ſay that the *Goſpel Hiſtory* was quickly prov'd falſe

falſe by other Hiſtories written and publiſh'd about the ſame time) than I ſay it is utterly impoſſible that an *Impoſture* quickly diſcover'd to be an *Impoſture*, and which ſerv'd no worldly Intereſt, ſhould ever have ſo gained ground as Chriſtianity did, againſt that apparent *Truth* and mighty *Power* and *Intereſt* that were on the other ſide. So that whatever Progreſs Chriſtianity might have made for a ſhort time at firſt, by reaſon of the Boldneſs and Confidence of its firſt Preachers, it muſt needs be that immediately from and after the Time that the *Anti-Goſpel* Hiſtories (of better Credit and Authority than the *Goſpel Hiſtory* was) were publiſh'd, it muſt have declined much faſter than it had before increaſed; and in a very few Years have ſo dwindled to nothing, that 'tis like in the Age in which we live there would hardly have been ſo much as any Remembrance of it left.

And now, if nothing more could be ſaid upon this Subject (for I have not time at preſent to take into Conſideration the *other Proofs* before hinted at of the *Truth* of the *Goſpel-Hiſtory*) I think what has been ſaid already is enough to ſhew that there is *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to the *Evangelical Writers*, in their *Relations* of thoſe *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded; This I'm ſure of, that upon much leſs Evidence and Aſſurance of Truth than we have in this, we generally give Credit to other Hiſtories.

For we believe other *Hiſtorians* in their Relation of ſuch Matters as they could not have ſo *certain Knowledge* or ſo *good Aſſurance* of as the *Evangelical Writers* might have of thoſe plain *Matters* of *Fact* and *Senſe* which they have related in *their Hiſtory*.

And again, we believe other *Hiſtorians* giving an Account

Account of things which they do not pretend to have had a *perſonal Knowledge* of; which were done in *Countries* far *diſtant* from them; and in *Times* long *before* them; which their *Readers* had no *Means* to enquire into the Truth of; which were done in *ſecret*, or when but *few* were by; and which if they were falſly related, none were *engaged* by any Worldly Intereſt to be at much *Pains* to *diſprove*.

And laſtly, If *two Hiſtorians* of the ſame Antiquity give different or contradictory Accounts of the ſame Matter, we do not for that Reaſon alone preſently *reject* either of them; but we enquire which of them was in the *beſt Capacity* to know the Truth, and which of them is the leaſt *liable* to the *ſuſpicion* of *falſhood*, and which Story is the moſt *probably related*, and to the Belief of *that* we encline.

If therefore there be any Man that thinks there is any truth in Hiſtory, and who does give Credit to other Hiſtories, (and I believe there is no Man but does ſo) and yet will not be perſuaded to allow that the *Goſpel Hiſtory* is very *credible*, (which contains a Relation only of ſuch *Matters* of *Senſe* as it was morally impoſſible there ſhould be any *Cheat* or *Deceit* in; and in which if there had been any Deceit or Miſtake it was morally impoſſible that it ſhould not be *diſcover'd* and *diſprov'd*; and which, yet, neither is now nor ever was *contradicted* by any *Hiſtory* of competent *Antiquity* and good *Credit*;) I think we may very well conclude, that 'tis not *Reaſon* or *Judgment*; but *Prejudice*, or *Intereſt*, or the *Love* of ſome *Vice* or *Luſt* that makes him an *Infidel*.

The End of the Fourth Sermon.

THE

Fifth Sermon.

St. Luke XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he ſaid, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.

THE Subject I was upon in my laſt Diſcourſe on theſe Words, and which I left unfiniſh'd, was to ſhew, That there is *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to the *Authors* of the *Hiſtorical Books* of the *New Teſtament* in their *Relations* of thoſe *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded.

For the Proof of which I propoſed theſe following things to be conſidered; (1) The *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumſtances* of the *Matters* they have recorded, and of the *Hiſtory* its ſelf. (2) The good *Capacity*

they were in to *know* the Truth of the Things they have related. (3) The ſtrong *Obligations* they were under to *write* nothing but the *Truth* according to the beſt of their Knowledge or Information. (4) The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honeſty* and *Faithfulneſs*. And (5) Laſtly, The *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their Hiſtory by *God himſelf*.

The laſt Diſcourſe was ſpent in the Conſideration of the firſt of theſe things. I proceed now to the Second, *viz.*

(2.) The good *Capacity* that the Writers of the *Evangelical Hiſtory* were in to *know* the Truth of thoſe things which they have related.

Now the Matters of *Hiſtory* which are related in the *Epiſtles* are but few, and thoſe, for the moſt part, ſuch as had been done by, or had happened to, either the Perſons that wrote them, or the Churches or Perſons to whom they were written; ſo that of theſe we ſhall not need to ſay any thing.

For the Bulk or Body of the *Evangelical Hiſtory* is contain'd in the *Four Goſpels*, and in the *Acts of the Apoſtles*; And of the *Authors* of theſe Books there is no Controverſie in the Chriſtian Church; And if they were written by the *reputed Authors*, a few Words will ſuffice to ſhew that *they* were in a very good *Capacity* to *know* the Truth of the Things they have recorded, much better than moſt other ancient Hiſtorians, whoſe Relations, nevertheleſs, are generally thought worthy of Credit.

For St. *Matthew* and St. *John* two of the four *Evangeliſts* were of the number of thoſe *Twelve* who were in conſtant Attendance upon our Lord, from the Time

Time that he firſt began to preach and to make Diſciples, until he was taken up into Heaven; ſo that they were themſelves *Eye* or *Ear-Witneſſes* of moſt of the Things which they have recorded.

Of St. *Mark* and St. *Luke* indeed the ſame cannot be ſaid; neither is it certain that they were of the Number of the Seventy Diſciples, (tho' that be affirmed by ſome of the Ancients:) But this I think is agreed to by all; that St. *Mark* was for ſome part of his Life a conſtant Companion of St. *Peter*, who was not only one of the *Twelve*, but, moſt probably, the *Firſt* that was call'd to be an Apoſtle, and who was alſo one of the *three* with whom our Lord was moſt intimate and familiar (for we often read, that *Peter*, and *James* and *John* were ſingled from the reſt to be Witneſſes of ſome of the moſt private Tranſactions of his Life:) And it was generally believed in the Ancient Church, that St. *Peter* was more truly the Author of the *Goſpel* called St. *Mark*'s than St. *Mark* himſelf; *He* being only the *Scribe* or *Amanuenſis*, and St. *Peter* the Perſon that *dictated* the things written by him; whence alſo this Goſpel is by ſome of the Ancients ſtiled *the Goſpel of St. Peter*. And of this there ſeem to be ſome Tokens even in the Hiſtory its ſelf; particularly in that Relation that is therein given of St. *Peter*'s *Denial* of his Maſter, and of his *Repentance* for it; for his *Denial* is there told with ſome more Circumſtances than in the other Goſpels, (ſuch as the Perſon himſelf chiefly concerned was beſt able to know and might beſt remember;) And the Account that is given of his *Repentance*, is by this Author expreſſed more modeſtly (as it beſt became a Perſon to ſpeak who ſpake of himſelf) than it is by the other

Matt. 17. 4. 26, 37. Mark 5. 37.

Evangeliſts; for St. *Matthew* and St. *Luke* ſay that he wept *bitterly*; but St. *Mark* (or rather St. *Peter* himſelf dictating thoſe Words) only ſays, that *when he thought thereon he wept.*

It is likewiſe agreed on all Hands that St. *Luke*, if not one of the Seventy Diſciples (which, 'tis moſt probable he was not) was, however a very early Convert to Chriſtianity; that he converſed frequently with the *Apoſtles* and immediate Diſciples of our Lord, and was a conſtant Companion of St. *Paul*, for a good while, in his Preaching and Travels; ſo that of almoſt all the Things which he relates in his *Hiſtory* of the *Acts of the Apoſtles* he might be, and of much the greateſt part of them, 'tis moſt probable, and of ſome, 'tis certain, he was an *Eye* or *Ear-Witneſs.*

So then, There are *three* of the *five* Hiſtorical Books of the *New Teſtament* that were written by thoſe who were preſent at moſt of the things which they have related, (*viz.* the *Goſpels* of St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, and the *Acts of the Apoſtles*;) and another of them tho' it bears the Name of St. *Mark* the Perſon by whom it was penned, yet if it was (as has been generally believ'd) dictated by St. *Peter*, may be added to that number, and be likewiſe reckon'd the Teſtimony of One who was an *Eye-Witneſs* of the things he has related.

In this Reſpect therefore the *Goſpel Hiſtory* is manifeſtly as credible as 'tis poſſible any Hiſtory ſhould be; for no Hiſtorian can record any thing upon better Aſſurance of its Truth than the Evidence of his own Senſes.

But

But the *Gospel* of St. *Luke*, it must be granted, is not of this sort; He himself does not pretend that the Matters by him recorded were of his own Knowledge; he only says, *He had perfect understanding of them from the very first, from those who from the Beginning were Eye-witnesses and Ministers of the Word.* Luke 1. 2, 3. And of some few Matters recorded by the other *Evangelists*, the same must likewise be granted (particularly of the things that were done before they were called to be *Apostles*; of these things I say, it must be granted) that 'tis most probable they were not Matters of their own Knowledge, that they recorded them only upon credible Information from others; But when 'tis consider'd on the other hand, that there are very few things related by St. *Luke* which are not to be found in some of the other Gospels, *his Testimony* that he had perfect Information of the things he has recorded from *several* Eye-witnesses, adds a Degree of credibility even to the other Gospels, and is a good corroborating Evidence of their Truth; And all the Matters recorded by him, or the other *Evangelists* only upon *Information* of others, must be granted to be more credible than the Matter of most other ancient Histories of good Credit is, if we reflect upon what was said in the former Discourse concerning the *Nature* and *Circumstances* of the things recorded; particularly, that they were such things as might be most *certainly known*, and were capable of the *best attestation*; and that they were things done in the *same Age*, and in the *same Countrey* in which they lived who have written the History thereof.

And what hath been said is, I hope, *sufficient* to shew the good *Capacity* the *Authors* of the *Historical* Parts

Parts of the *New Teſtament* were in to *know* the Truth of the Things they have recorded; moſt of them being ſuch as 'tis probable *three* of the *Evangeliſts* (as *Two* of them, without all Diſpute) were *Eye witneſſes* of, and the reſt ſuch as they might have certain *Information* of from ſeveral Perſons then alive, and well able to witneſs the ſame.

Of the *Ability* then of theſe Authors to write a true Hiſtory of theſe Matters, I think, there can be no reaſonable Doubt; And that there is as little Reaſon to doubt of their *Honeſty* and *Faithfulneſs*, will in part appear; if we conſider in the third place,

(3) The ſtrong *Obligations* they were under to *write* nothing but the *Truth*, according to the beſt of their Knowledge or Information.

Now the *Obligations* that Men are under to ſpeak or write Truth may be reduc'd to two Heads, *Honour* and *Conſcience*; By both which the *Evangelical Writers* were more ſtrongly obliged to Truth in their Relations than commonly other Hiſtorians are.

1. One *Obligation* that lies on all Men to ſpeak or write nothing but what is true, is *Honour*. For there is nothing that is generally accounted more baſe or diſhonourable than to tell a Lye; there is nothing that by thoſe who ſtand moſt upon their Honour is thought more reflecting and diſparaging, and more neceſſary to be reſented as an high Affront than to have the Lye given them. What therefore is generally thought to be a great Reproach it may reaſonably be preſumed (unleſs the contrary appears) a Man will be careful to avoid by not giving any juſt Occaſion to have it caſt upon him.

And

And this is one Ground of that great Credit that is generally given to ancient Hiſtories; 'tis preſum'd (unleſs there be evident cauſe to think otherwiſe) that the Authors of them were Men of ſo much *Honour*, and that they had ſuch a ſenſe of the Reproach and Diſcredit that it would be to them to be found out in a Lye, as made them careful not to record any thing as a certain Truth, but what they had good Knowledge or Information of.

But that this *Obligation* to Truth was ſtronger on the *Authors* of the *Evangelical Hiſtory*, than on moſt other Hiſtorians is abundantly evident from what was noted the laſt time concerning the Nature and Conditions of the things by them related, and of their Hiſtory of them.

For the Matter of moſt other ancient Hiſtories is ſuch that the Hiſtorians might report many things untruly or upon ſlight Information, and yet be pretty well aſſur'd that they ſhould not be reputed Liars; becauſe the Matters recorded by them being things either done in ſome *Places* a good way of, or in ſome *time* long before, or in the Preſence of but *few* Perſons, they might know that none of thoſe into whoſe Hands their Hiſtories would fall would be in a Capacity to contradict them tho' they were falſe; Or they might reaſonably ſuppoſe that their Readers would rather acquieſce in their Report, than travel ſo far or take ſo much Pains as they muſt have done to diſprove it; eſpecially if it was a Matter of no great Conſequence to their Readers whether their Report was true or falſe.

But in the *Goſpel Hiſtory* the Caſe was quite otherwiſe, and the Hiſtorians themſelves could not but know

know that it was so. For there were a great many concern'd to find out some Falsity in it, and there were a great many that would have taken any pains to have done it; and yet the Matters related by the *Evangelists*, and their Manner of relating them were such, that their History, if it had been false in any particular, might have been disprov'd with the greatest ease, without being at any Pains to do it; because most of those into whose Hands it first came, would either have known it to be false, or would readily have been told that it was so, by abundance of Persons that could of their own Knowledge have contradicted it. So that if it be supposed that the *Evangelists* had any Regard at all to their own *Reputation*, it can't be imagin'd either that they did record any thing contrary to their Knowledge, or that in Matters that were not of their own Knowledge they neglected to get the best Information and Intelligence that could be had; because if they had done either of these, they could not have been so vain as to hope to escape being Censured as the most notorious and shameless Liars that ever wrote. But,

2. The strongest *Obligation* that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but the Truth, is *Conscience*; And the sense that all Men are supposed to have of the natural Turpitude of a Lye, is the chief ground of that very great Credit that we give to humane Testimony in Cases of the greatest Concern and Consequence.

But this *Obligation* to Truth was likewise stronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History* than on most other Historians; 'twas indeed so very strong that nothing less than an evident Proof of their Falsity can justifie the entertaining so much as a suspicion of it.

For

For to ſpeak and write the Truth was what they were obliged to, not only by the Law of Nature to which all Men are alike ſubject, but alſo by the Rules of that Religion which they had been bred up in, (by which they had been expreſly forbidden to *lye one to another*, and by which they had been taught that *a Falſe Witneſs that ſpeaketh Lyes is an Abomination to the Lord.*) and eſpecially by the ſtrict Command of him whom they had lately taken for their Maſter, and whoſe Laws and Religion they were to preach and propagate in the World, by which they were obliged, and under the ſevereſt Penalty, no leſs than Eternal Damnation, *to put away all Lying, and to ſpeak every Man the Truth to his Neighbour.*

Lev. 19. 11. Pro. 6. 16, 19.

Eph. 4. 25. Rev. 21. 8.

The *Subject Matter* of their Relation did alſo lay upon them the ſtrongeſt Obligation to have a ſtrict Regard to Truth in every thing that they wrote. For if it be a Sin to ſpeak an Untruth in any *common* Matter, it is manifeſtly a greater Sin to do it in *grave* and *ſerious* Things, when Truth is moſt expected; and eſpecially in *Matters* of *Religion*, wherein a Lye is moſt unbecoming; And if it be a Sin to utter a Slander, or to tell a Lye of a *Man*, it is evidently a Sin of a more heinous Nature, to report an Untruth concerning *God*, and to utter a Falſhood in the *Name* of *God*; And if to lead Men into *any Miſtake* by a falſe Relation be a Practice not to be juſtified, altho' the Miſtake they are led into be of no hurtful Conſequence either to themſelves or to the World, it is evidently a great Aggravation of the Lye if Men are thereby deceived in a Caſe of the *neareſt* and *deareſt* Concern to them, if they are led thereby into an Error that may prove *fatal* to them

to all Eternity; And laſtly, If it be a very great Sin, only *once* to ſpeak an Untruth that may be prejudicial to *one* Man, it is plainly the greateſt and the moſt unpardonable Sin of this kind to *record* an Untruth, with a Deſign thereby to deceive to their Everlaſting Deſtruction *all* the *Men* that ſhall ever be born into the World in all future Ages.

If therefore the *Goſpel Hiſtory* be falſe, there was manifeſtly ſuch a *Complication* of moſt horrid *Wickedneſs* in the Publiſhers and Compilers of it, as it is not fair to ſuppoſe even *one* ſingle Man would be guilty of; and much leſs can it be reaſonably ſuppoſed that *ſeveral* Men (*viz.* not only the *Four Evangeliſts*, but *all* the other *Apoſtles* who preached the ſame things that they wrote) did conſent to the reporting of ſo *many*, and ſuch *notorious* and *hurtful* Untruths.

But this, it may be it will be ſaid, is not a direct proof that the *Evangeliſts* were true and faithful in their Relations, but only a *probable ground* of preſuming that they were ſo. And I grant it is no more, But nevertheleſs, I think, if nothing more could be offered, this alone wou'd be ſufficient to render their Teſtimony highly credible, ſo long as nothing is alledged on the other ſide to diſprove it; And in all other Caſes we allow it to be ſo. For by the Teſtimony of Perſons of whoſe Truth we have no other Aſſurance but ſuch a *probable Preſumption*, all Queſtions and Controverſies of the greateſt Concern, relating to the Lives and Eſtates of Men, are in this World finally decided; every Man that bears Witneſs in any ſuch Caſe being, by the common Judgment of Mankind, taken and accepted as a good Witneſs,

neſs, unleſs the contrary appears; And by the Teſtimony of two or three ſuch Witneſſes we all conſent that *every Matter* ſhould be *eſtabliſhed.*

But then I add further, that beſides this *reaſonable Preſumption* of the Truth of the *Witneſſes* of the *Goſpel Hiſtory*, (which is all that we ordinarily have, or do deſire in other Caſes) there is as good *poſitive* Proof of their Truth as can be required. And this was the next Thing propos'd to be conſider'd, *viz.*

(4) The good *Evidences* that we have of their Honeſty and Faithfulneſs.

And here it may be noted (for tho' it be a thing that we lay no great ſtreſs upon in this Caſe, yet I think 'tis not to be omitted, becauſe 'tis one of the beſt Evidences that we can have of the Faithfulneſs of any Hiſtorian whoſe perſonal Character is unknown to us) that the Authors of the *Evangelical Hiſtory* ſeem to have related all Matters with the greateſt *Impartiality*; that they ſeem as *free* in telling the things that were, or might be accounted *diſgraceful* to their Maſter or themſelves, as in telling thoſe things that were moſt *glorious* and *reputable.* For thus, in their Hiſtory of the Life of *Chriſt*, as they tell us the wonderfulneſs of his Birth, the many Miracles that he wrought, the Teſtimony that was given him by the Deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt upon him, and by the Voice of God, his Glorious Reſurrection from the Dead and Aſcenſion into Heaven; ſo they ſtick not to tell us alſo the *Meanneſs* of his Parentage, the *Obſcurity* of his Birth, his *poor* and *low* Condition in the World, the *Affronts* that were given him, the *Contempt* he was had in, and the ſhameful *Death* he was put to. And of themſelves, They have left it upon

Record to all Posterity, that they were of the *meanest* Extraction, and bred up to very *poor* or *scandalous* Employments, that they were *Fisher-Men*, *Tent-Makers*, *Publicans*; They own that they were *ignorant* and *unlearned* Men; they tell their own *Childish Mistakes* about the Nature of the Kingdom of the *Messiah*; they mention their own *foolish* and *ambitious Contentions* with one another about worldly Greatness; they confess their own *Baseness* and *Cowardice* in forsaking their Master when in Danger, after the most solemn Profession of Friendship, and repeated Assurances of Stedfastness and Fidelity. St. *Peter*'s Denial of Christ is a thing noted by all the *Evangelists*, and by St. *Peter* himself (if the Gospel of St. *Mark* be accounted *his*) is told with its *worst* Circumstances; and St. *Paul* freely owns that before his Conversion to Christianity he was a *Blasphemer*, a *Persecutor*, and *injurious*, and the *chief of Sinners*. Now their Recording such things as these concerning their Master and themselves, as it is an Evidence of their *Impartiality*, is consequently a good Argument of the Truth of their History; for had they allowed themselves a Liberty of varying from the Truth in any particular, it cannot be imagin'd but that they would at least have concealed their own Frailties and Infirmities; it can't be suppos'd they would have furnished their Adversaries with Matter wherewith to reproach them.

But 'tis possible that an Historian who means to deceive his Readers in some Matter of greater Moment, may purposely insert some few such Passages as these, thereby to gain himself an easier Belief in other Things, and to cover his wicked Design. 'Tis therefore

therefore another and a better Evidence of the Truth of the *Goſpel Hiſtory*, that the *Evangeliſts* and other Witneſſes of the Facts recorded in the Goſpels, were Perſons not liable to any juſt ſuſpicion of Unfaithfulneſs in their Relations; becauſe whatever they had been before, they were then in all other Reſpects Perſons of a very *good Character*. *Ye are Witneſſes* (ſays the Apoſtle) *and God alſo, how holily and juſtly and unblameably we behaved our ſelves among you.* They that could not be charged with any *other Crimes* were not juſtly to be ſuſpected guilty of *Forgery* and *Lying*. And we have abundant Reaſon to believe that they were in all other Reſpects unblameable, becauſe there is no Evidence that they were ever charged at all, (either truly or falſly) even by their greateſt Enemies, with any other Fault but only too great Zeal and Induſtry in propagating their Religion. And 'tis no Wonder that this ſhould be thought a Fault by thoſe who were of another Religion; or that by the Powers that then were, who endeavoured with all their might to ſuppreſs the Growth of Chriſtianity, the *Apoſtles* who were ſo zealous to ſpread it ſhould be looked upon as *diſaffected* to their *Government*, and *Movers* of *Sedition*; But however, this, if it had been a Fault, was not ſuch a Crime as could juſtly have render'd their Honeſty ſuſpected, but on the contrary, it was rather a very good Argument that however they might poſſibly be miſtaken, yet they did believe themſelves; 'tis a fair Proof that they thought they had good Evidence of the things they teſtified, and that they reckoned themſelves under a ſtrict Obligation to teſtifie the ſame.

1 Theſ. 2. 10.

For

For 'tis plain (and that's another good Argument of their Veracity) that they could have no *Worldly End* or *Design* either in the Framing or Publiſhing of thoſe Stories which they related; ſo that if they were *Fables* which they told, they were far from being *cunningly deviſed Fables*, becauſe, as the World then was, they could not be ſo vain as to hope to raiſe themſelves either to *Honour* or *Wealth* by preaching a *Crucified Meſſiah, to the Jews a Stumbling Block, and to the Greeks, Fooliſhneſs.* Now 'tis not to be ſuppoſed that any Man will frame or report a Lye for *nothing*; Whoever knowingly deceives another, muſt be ſuppoſed to intend ſome Advantage to himſelf thereby; And therefore if there be no Untruth appearing in the Relation, and no Gain or other Advantage that the Reporter can be ſuppoſed to make to himſelf by it, it may very reaſonably be preſumed that the Report is true. But ſo far was this, if it was a Lye, from being a profitable and advantageous Lye to the Forgers and Reporters of it, that on the contrary it was, and they could not but readily foreſee that it would be very *prejudicial* to their Worldly Intereſts, expoſing them to all ſorts of Perſecutions from all ſorts of Men; For both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and every Sect and Party of every other Religion, however hating one another with a mortal Hatred, readily joyned together to perſecute the *Chriſtians*, and thoſe above all others who were the *Witneſſes* of Chriſtianity, the *Ringleaders* (as they called them) *of the Sect of the Nazareens.*

This therefore may be reckon'd another Evidence of their Truth; (and as 'tis a ſtronger Evidence of Truth than any that has been yet mentioned, ſo 'tis ſuch

ſuch an one as I believe no Hiſtory in the World has, but that of the Goſpel) *viz.* That no *Threats* or *Puniſhments* could move the Witneſſes of thoſe things that are recorded in the *Evangelical Hiſtory* ſo much as to *deſiſt* from giving freſh Teſtimony to the Truth of the Things which they had once related. For this ſeems to have been all that was ever required or expected from them; not that they ſhould retract the Teſtimony they had given, but only that they ſhould *not ſpeak or teach any more in the Name of Jeſus*; And upon this Condition alone any of them might have expected both a Pardon for what they had done before, and likewiſe all fitting Favour and Encouragement. But this was what they all refuſed to do, giving no other Reaſon of their Refuſal but this, that they were very ſure of the Truth of the things they had ſpoken, and that there was a neceſſity laid upon them to preach the Goſpel. *Whether*, ſay they, *it be right in the ſight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but ſpeak the things which we have ſeen and heard.* And the more they were threatned to hold their Peace, ſo much the more boldly did they ſpeak, not only *filling Jeruſalem with their Doctrine*, but likewiſe ſpreading the ſame in all the World. And tho' they knew that *in every City* where they came *Bonds and Afflictions did abide there*; *None of theſe things moved them, neither did they count their Lives dear unto themſelves, ſo that they might finiſh their Courſe with Joy, and the Miniſtery which they had receiv'd of the Lord Jeſus, to teſtifie the Goſpel of the Grace of God.*

Acts 4. 18. 5. 46.

Acts 4. 19, 20.

Acts 20. 23, 24.

And if theſe Proofs and Evidences already mentioned of the Truth and Faithfulneſs of the *Apoſtles* and

and *Evangeliſts* are not thought ſufficient to gain them Credit, what is there that would be ſufficient? for more Evidence, or better Proof cannot reaſonably be deſired, ſo good is very rarely to be met with, or expected; And indeed I think there is but only one ſtronger Proof thereof that can ever poſſibly be given by *Men*; And that is when a Witneſs lays down his *Life* to confirm the Teſtimony he has given; for if when a Man has witneſſed any thing, and is queſtioned for it, and threatned with *Death* if he perſiſts in it, he ſtill continues boldly to teſtifie the ſame thing; and eſpecially if when upon the *Rack* or on the *Croſs*, in the midſt of the *ſharpeſt Torments*, and even at the Hour of his *Death*, he Juſtifies the Truth of his former Teſtimony, he certainly gives the *beſt Aſſurance* that 'tis poſſible for any Man to give of his Honeſty and Truth; And if any humane Teſtimony be credible, this is certainly ſo in the higheſt Degree.

That therefore our Belief of the Goſpel might be built upon the ſureſt grounds, it pleaſed the Divine Wiſdom ſo to Order it that all thoſe who were the firſt Witneſſes thereof to the World, ſhould give likewiſe this beſt poſſible Proof of their Veracity. For of all the *Apoſtles* and *Evangeliſts* of the manner of whoſe Death there is any Memory preſerved either by Hiſtory or Tradition, St. *John* is the only Perſon that did not ſeal the Teſtimony he had given with his Blood. And that he did not ſuffer *Martyrdom* as well as the Reſt was not occaſioned by his *forbearing* to repeat the Teſtimony he had before given, and much leſs by his *Retracting* it, but was meerly an Act of Divine and *Miraculous Providence*, whereby

whereby tho' he was put into a *Cauldron* of *Boyling Oyl*, his Life was preſerv'd; ſo that in Truth, conſidering the Hazard he ran of his Life, which could not have been ſaved but by a Miracle, he may very well be accounted a *Martyr* for the *Teſtimony* of *Jeſus*, no leſs than the other *Apoſtles*, altho' he did not actually *expire* under his Sufferings as they did.

Now if it be ſuppoſed that a Man, eſpecially one who ſtands much upon his Credit, may be willing, after he has told a Lye, to ſuffer a great Deal rather than own himſelf a Lyar; (tho' I think it cannot reaſonably be ſuppoſed, either, that any Man would ſuffer ſo many other great Evils as the *Apoſtles* did, only upon a Point of *Honour*; or that the *Apoſtles* did ſtand ſo much upon their *Honour*) yet when it is brought to this, that a Man who has told a Lye muſt either *retract* it, or *die* for it, and that he may in all Probability ſave his Life by retracting it, it is not to be ſuppoſed that any Man will be a *Martyr* for a *known Falſhood*; for it is a very true Saying, and to which there is hardly any Exception, tho' it was ſpoken by the Father of Lyes, that *Skin for Skin, yea all that a Man hath he will give for his Life*? 'Tis not credible therefore that ſo much as *one* Man ſhould be found ſo fooliſh as to ſacrifice his Life to a known Lye, and that too an *unprofitable* Lye, to himſelf, to his Family, and to all the World; and this only to ſave his *Reputation*; It is much leſs credible that ſo *many* Men, *viz. all* the *Apoſtles* and *Evangeliſts*, and moſt if not all the reſt of our Lord's immediate Diſciples ſhould be guilty of ſuch prodigious and unheard of Folly; and it is leaſt of all credible that among ſo many as there were that bore Witneſs

Job 2. 4.

of the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical Hiſtory*, not ſo much as *one* Man ſhould be found that was *honeſter* and *wiſer* than the reſt; not *one* that could be perſuaded to give Glory to God by the Confeſſion of his Fault, and ſatisfaction to the World by a publick owning of the Cheat he had been engaged in; not *one* that wou'd chuſe to undergo the Diſgrace of a Lyar rather than the ſhameful Death of a Malefactor.

Theſe are in ſhort the *Evidences* we have of the *Honeſty* and *Faithfulneſs* of the *Evangelical Hiſtorians*, thoſe Evidences I mean which they themſelves have given thereof; and they are plainly as good as could be deſired, they are the beſt that could be given by Men.

And putting together all that hath been ſaid on this and the foregoing Heads, now, and in my laſt Diſcourſe, for the Proof of the Truth of the *Evangelical Hiſtory*, I think we may truly and confidently affirm, that altho' we conſider it only as a meer *humane* Hiſtory, we have much greater Reaſon to give Credit to it than to any Hiſtory in the World beſides.

But *if we receive the witneſs of Men*, (and who
1 Joh. 5. 9. is there that does not?) *the Witneſs of God is greater*; And therefore in Order to ſhew further that there is *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to the *Evangelical Hiſtorians* in their *Relations* of thoſe *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded, I propoſed to be conſidered, in the Fifth and laſt Place,

(5) The *Confirmation* that was given to the Truth of their Hiſtory, by *God himſelf*. For what St. *Paul* ſays of his own, was likewiſe true of the *Speech and Preaching* of all the other *Apoſtles*; *viz.* That it *was*

in

in Demonſtration of the Spirit and of Power; *that* the *Faith* of their Hearers *ſhould not ſtand in the Wiſdom of Men, but in the Power of God.* And ſo St. *Luke* ſays; *Acts* 4. 33. *With great Power gave the Apoſtles Witneſs of the Reſurrection of the Lord Jeſus.* For at the ſame Time that they *Witneſſed* the *Miracles* of their Maſter, they gave Aſſurance to Men of the Truth of their Teſtimony by doing the like *Miracles* themſelves, healing the Sick, caſting out Devils, raiſing the Dead, *&c.* juſt as *Jeſus* himſelf had done. And at the ſame time that, purſuant to their Commiſſion, they preached the Goſpel to Men of all *Nations* and *Languages*, they plainly demonſtrated, both that they had ſuch a Commiſſion from God, and that it was the Truth of God which they preached, by ſpeaking to every Man of every Nation in his *own Tongue.* 1 Cor. 2. 4, 5.

Thus, as the *Author* to the *Hebrews* ſays, *God did bear them Witneſs both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own Will.* And he might well ſay, that *God* did hereby bear them Witneſs, becauſe that *Power* wherewith they were *endued* was ſo evidently *from on high*, that none that ſaw their Works, and conſidered withall the Purity and Excellence of the Doctrine of Chriſtianity that was thereby eſtabliſh'd, could have any reaſonable Doubt whether they were done by the Power of God or no. *We know*, ſaid *Nicodemus* to our Saviour, *that thou art a Teacher ſent from God, for no Man can do the Miracles that thou doeſt, except God be with him:* But the *ſame Works that Jeſus did, did his Diſciples alſo*, after he had ſent down the *Promiſe of his Father* upon them, Heb. 2. 4. Luke 24. 49. Joh. 3. 2. Joh. 14. 12.

on the Day of *Pentecoſt*; yea *and greater Works than thoſe did they do*; ſo that whoever beheld their Works, might (ſo far as Miracles are Evidences of a Divine Power) be rather more certain that *God was with them*, than *Nicodemus* could be, that he was with our *Lord himſelf*. For tho' their other Miracles, that were of the ſame ſort with thoſe which our Saviour had done, were ſuch Proofs of Divine Aſſiſtance as could not, with any Reaſon be gainſaid; yet, I think it may truly be affirm'd, that the *Gift* of *Tongues*, which was peculiar to them, and wherein they did (as we may ſay) excell even our Lord himſelf, was more convincing than any of them; For he that ſaw one of their other Miracles might poſſibly entertain ſome little Doubt whether the Effect that appeared to him to be Miraculous might not yet be done by ſome ſecret Power of Natural Cauſes that was unknown to him; But we all know the Power of Nature ſo well, that we are ſure, the Knowledge of a Language cannot poſſibly be attained Naturally, even by a Perſon of the quickeſt Parts and faithfulleſt Memory, but in ſo much time, at the leaſt, as it will neceſſarily take up to be told by Tutors, or to learn from *Lexicons*, what every particular word of the Language to be learnt, is by the People of that Language deſigned to ſignifie; becauſe Words have not a Natural Relation to the Notions or Things thereby expreſſed, but are meer arbitrary Signs thereof. So that whoever knew the Education of the *Apoſtles*, and that they were before altogether *ignorant* and *unlearned*, and yet ſaw them every one, on a ſudden, on the Day of *Pentecoſt*, able to ſpeak readily in all the Languages of all the Nations under Heaven, from whence

whence had come ſome of the *Jews* that were preſent at *Jeruſalem* at that time, could have no poſſible Doubt of their Supernatural Aſſiſtance; They that heard them ſpeak with *Tongues*, which they had never learned, could not but conclude that it was the *Spirit* that *gave them* this *Utterance*, becauſe nothing elſe could give it; So that this was not only (as their other Miracles were) a *Proof* of *Inſpiration*, but likewiſe an *Inſtance* and *Example* of it; It was a Proof of an inward and inviſible Inſpiration, by an Inſpiration that was (as I may ſay) outward and viſible; by an Inſpiration that was diſcernible even by the Bodily Senſes of all thoſe that were preſent. Acts 2. 4.

But be it ſo, perhaps the *Infidels* will ſay, that they that ſaw the *Miracles* which the *Apoſtles* are reported to have done in the Name of *Chriſt*, had Reaſon enough to believe their Teſtimony concerning him, and as well *that* which they have left in Writing, as that which they gave by word of Mouth; Yet what's this to us that live now? For we neither ſaw the *Miracles* that they wrought, nor heard them ſpeaking with *Tongues*; neither have we any Aſſurance that they ever did either the one or the other but only from *themſelves*. They indeed tell us that they did a great many wonderful things (ſuch as we are willing enough to grant could not be done but by the Power of God) in Confirmation of their Teſtimony concerning *Jeſus*; But we ſee no more Reaſon to believe *this* their *Teſtimony* concerning *themſelves*, than there is to believe their other Teſtimony concerning him; ſo that *this* cannot in reaſon be reckoned a Proof or Confirmation of *that*; Nay, rather, we think they are leſs credible Witneſſes in their own Caſe than they were

were in his. So that to us the *Hiſtory* of the *New Teſtament* (granting it to be written by the *Apoſtles*) is of no more Authority than *their* Writing it (conſidered only with reſpect to their Natural and Moral Capacities and Qualifications) could give to it; Becauſe that *Seal* of *Miracles* which is ſaid to have been affixed thereto by *God*, is now, by length of Time quite worn off; or at leaſt the Impreſſion thereof is now ſo defaced, that we cannot diſtinguiſh *whoſe Seal* it was, or whether it was a *true Seal* or a *counterfeit* one; And that this *Seal* was ever affixed to their Teſtimony, is teſtified only by thoſe ſame Witneſſes, whoſe the Teſtimony its ſelf was.

To this Objection therefore (which, it muſt be confeſſed, has ſome Appearance of Weight and Reaſon in it) I anſwer,

1. By denying the Ground it is built upon, *viz.* That the Teſtimony of the *Apoſtles themſelves* is the *only* Proof we have of the *Miracles* which they wrought for the Confirmation of their Teſtimony concerning *Jeſus*. For beſides the Teſtimony of the *Apoſtles*, in their *Epiſtles*, and in the *Acts*, Witneſſing their own *Miracles*, we have likewiſe the Teſtimony of all the other *Chriſtian Writers*, whoſe Books are preſerved, that lived in or near the Apoſtle's Times, Witneſſing the ſame Thing; And this Teſtimony, not only given as it were in ſecret, in order to the making Proſelytes of ſuch as they found to be eaſie and credulous; but in the moſt *publick manner*, in thoſe *Apologies* for the Chriſtian Faith which they preſented to *Magiſtrates*, and publiſhed to the whole *World*; in which, for Proof that theſe *Miracles* had been wrought by the *Apoſtles*, they appeal to all the Hiſtories and Records

Records of the Apoſtle's Times then extant; in which, they challenge any that could do it, to contradict their Teſtimony; in which, they teſtifie that the ſame Miraculous Power did ſtill continue in the Chriſtian Church, and was ſometimes exerted, often enough, and openly enough to prove its being, tho' not ſo frequently as it had been by the *Apoſtles* themſelves, when there was more need of ſhewing it, *viz.* at their firſt Preaching of the Goſpel.

Now theſe things, if they had not been true, the firſt Chriſtians, in the Circumſtances they were then in, would not have dared to affirm; and if they had been falſe, they might eaſily have been diſproved, and they would moſt certainly have been at leaſt boldly denied and contradicted by the profeſs'd Adverſaries of the Chriſtian Faith. But they did not deny or contradict, they did not offer to diſprove the Report that was then generally believed of the *Miracles* that had been done by the *Apoſtles*. Nay ſo far were they from this, that there is good Evidence from Antiquity ſtill remaining, that ſeveral even of thoſe who took upon them to oppoſe the Chriſtian Doctrine did yet expreſly own that great and mighty Works had indeed been done by the Hands of the *Apoſtles*, as well as of their Maſter; But then they had been done, they ſaid, (and that was all they could ſay in the Caſe) by *Magick Art*, by the *Help* of the *Devil*; juſt as the *Jews* had ſaid before of our Saviour, *Mat.* 12. 24. *This Fellow doth not caſt out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.*

I ſhall not ſtay now to ſhew how groundleſs as well as malicious this Suggeſtion was with reference both to our Lord's Miracles and to theirs, becauſe I ſuppoſe

I ſhall

I ſhall have a better Occaſion to do it hereafter in my next Diſcourſe; 'tis enough for my preſent purpoſe, if the Matter of Fact only be granted, *viz.* that the *Apoſtles* did do many *Miracles* in the Name of *Chriſt*, and to confirm their Teſtimony concerning him; And that they did ſo cannot I ſay, be reaſonably doubted, becauſe 'tis witneſſed not only by *themſelves*, but by all the *Chriſtian Writers* of thoſe or the ſucceeding times, and is not denied, nay is granted even by their *Adverſaries* and *Oppoſers*. But,

2. If we had not ſo good Proof of the *Miracles* done by the *Apoſtles*, if there were no Witneſſes thereof but themſelves, I ſay however that their Teſtimony alone would be very credible; Nay indeed the thing teſtified by them muſt, I think, neceſſarily have been acknowledged by us, altho' there had been no Hiſtory or Record at all of it tranſmitted to our Times. I do not mean that without the Light of Hiſtory we could have known that they did juſt thoſe very *Miracles* which are recorded, but I ſay that without this we might have known in general that they did do *Miracles*, or that they were aſſiſted by a *Supernatural Power*; (This, I ſay, we might have been ſure of) by the *permanent Effects* of ſuch a *Power*, continuing after their Times, and teſtified by all Hiſtorians, Heathen as well as Chriſtian, of all Ages ever ſince; and which are even ſtill extant and viſible.

For that a great Part of the World is now *Chriſtian* we ſee and know, and that it has been ſo for many Ages paſt we are as ſure as we are that there have been any Ages paſt before our own; And looking back to ſee when and how it came to be ſo, we learn, by the concurrent Teſtimony of all Hiſtory, *Jewiſh*, *Pagan* and

and *Chriſtian*, that *Chriſtianity* had its Beginning in *Judea*, juſt at that Time in which the Sacred Hiſtory places it; And by the ſame concurrent Teſtimony of all Hiſtory we learn that in a very ſhort time, in leſs than forty Years after, it was Preached in all the Provinces of the *Roman* Empire, and in all other Countries of the World that were then known, and of which we have any Hiſtory left; and that wherever it was Preached it made a very ſwift Progreſs, inſomuch that in a few Years the number of *Chriſtians* became very conſiderable and bare a great Proportion to the People of all other Religions; For it was not much above threeſcore Years after the Apoſtles had diſperſed themſelves in order to preach the Goſpel to the *Gentiles*, when *Pliny* Proconſul of *Bithynia*, wrote that *Epiſtle* to the Emperor *Trajan*, wherein giving an Account of the *Chriſtians* then under a ſevere Perſecution for their Religion by the Emperor's Order, he tells him *that there was a great number of Men obnoxious to Sufferings upon that Account; that many of all Ages, of all Orders and Degrees and of both Sexes were every Day called in Queſtion for it; that the Contagion of that Superſtition* (as he calls it) *had ſpread its ſelf not only in great Cities, but alſo in Towns and Country Villages, inſomuch that the Temples of the Heathen Gods, had for ſome Time before been in a manner deſolate, and their Worſhip and Sacrifices intermitted.*

Now this is certain that there can be no Effect without a Cauſe of ſufficient Power to produce it; And it was evidently impoſſible that Chriſtianity ſhould make ſo ſwift a Progreſs, and prevail ſo much in the World, as it did, in ſo ſhort a time, only by Natural Means. For without good Skill in the Lan-

guages of the feveral Nations wherein the Apoſtles were to preach the Goſpel, it had been in vain for them to have gone about to Convert all Nations; Or if they had attempted it, 'tis impoſſible it ſhould have been with ſucceſs; And how can it be conceived poſſible that *twelve grown* Men, who before underſtood not a word of any but their own Mother Tongue, and that perhaps not well, who had never been bred up to *Study*, and who were then paſt the proper *Age* of learning Languages, ſhould yet be able in ſo ſhort a time to become perfect Maſters of all the *Languages* then in uſe in the World, ſo as to ſpeak them readily and fluently, as if every one had been their own Native Tongue? and that after this, they ſhould have time enough ſtill left to go and preach the Goſpel in all Countries? So that the ſpeedy Converſion to Chriſtianity of ſuch a great number of Men in all Parts of the World by their Miniſtry, is a direct proof of that *Gift of Tongues* wherewith we believe they were endued; And whoever can believe that they had *this Gift*, which was peculiar and extraordinary, and ſuch as had never been heard of in the World before, may, I think, more eaſily believe all the other *Miracles* that they are reported to have done, which were not near ſo wonderful, which were ſuch as had been done by other Prophets in former Times.

But ſuppoſe this Story of the *Gift* of *Tongues* to be falſe, and that indeed the *Apoſtles* were Men of ſuch ready Natural *Parts* as to be able to learn all the *Languages* which they could have any uſe of in as few Days as it would have taken other Men Years to do it in; or elſe that they had in truth been bred up to the *Study* of *Languages* from their Childhood, and only

only concealed their Knowledge thereof until that famous Day of *Pentecoſt*, that ſo then it might be taken to be Miraculous; Yet what could *twelve Men* furniſhed with this excellent Skill, do by their own *Natural Power* only, towards the Converſion of the World to Chriſtianity in ſo ſhort a time?

For 'tis to be conſider'd that the Religion which they were to preach in the World was the moſt contrary that could be to the Carnal Luſts and Paſſions of Men; that it promis'd no Worldly Greatneſs, no Increaſe of Riches, no Enjoyment of Senſual Pleaſures; but on the contrary taught all thoſe that embrac'd it, to be mortified to all theſe Things, and not to ſet their Affections on any thing here below.

'Tis to be conſider'd alſo, that it propoſed to Man's Belief ſuch Doctrines as to the carnal Minds of Men could not but appear fooliſh or incredible; As that the Eternal Son of God did for our ſakes become Man, and take on him the Form of a Servant, that in that Form he ſubmitted to be ſcornfully uſed, cruelly ſcourged, and at laſt barbarouſly Crucified as a vile Malefactor by his own Creatures; that this ſame *Jeſus* was afterwards declared to be the Son of God with Power by the Reſurrection from the Dead, that he was taken up into Heaven, ſeated at the right Hand of the Father, had all Power in Heaven and Earth committed to him, was ordered to be Worſhipped and adored by all Men with the ſame Honour wherewith they honour the Father, and was appointed by God to be the Judge of the quick and dead, *&c.*

'Tis to be conſider'd likewiſe, that it was a Religion perfectly deſtructive of all other Forms of Religion then receiv'd or eſtabliſh'd in the World; and

upon that Account only muſt needs meet with the ſtrongeſt Prejudices; all the Men it was preached to being before from their Childhood bred up, and already fixed in another way.

And laſtly, 'tis to be conſider'd further, that the *Facts* upon which this Religion was grounded, that is, by which the Divine Miſſion of the Lord *Jeſus* was proved, *viz.* his *Miraculous Works*, were ſuch as being above the known Power of Natural Cauſes were not like to be eaſily credited. That he healed the Sick, that he gave Sight to the Blind, Hearing to the Deaf, Speech to the Dumb, Feet to the Lame, and Strength to the Cripples; that he did caſt out Devils; that he rais'd the Dead, and all theſe only with a Word's ſpeaking; that he fed ſometimes great Multitudes of four or five Thouſand with only ſo much Bread and Fiſh as to Appearance was not ſufficient for twenty Men; and that after they were all ſatisfied, there was more in Bulk left in Fragments than there had been before in whole Proviſion; That he walked on the Water as on dry Land; That he had the Winds and Seas obedient to his Command And above all, that he Raiſed himſelf to Life after he had been three Days Dead; Theſe and ſuch like were ſtrange Stories to be told to Men in order to perſuade them to take upon them a new Religion.

What then, I ſay, could *twelve Men*, tho' never ſo well furniſhed naturally with Parts and Learning and all other Endowments proper to qualifie them for ſuch a Work, do towards the perſuading the World to embrace Chriſtianity? Suppoſe they had gone (not as they did, one into this Country another into that; often ſingly, ſeldom more than two in Company; but) *all together* in

in a Body into ſome one Country remote from *Judea*, and there with *concurrent Teſtimony* born Witneſs of the Things they had ſeen and heard; yet who would have believ'd their Report? The Report of Strangers coming from a far Country, and of whoſe Honeſty and Truth they could have no Aſſurance but only from themſelves vouching for one another? Who would have given Credit to a Relation of ſuch incredible Stories, told with a Deſign to introduce a Religion that was unknown to their Fathers? and ſuch a ridiculous Religion too, as this, at the firſt Propoſal, wou'd probably appear; *viz.* the Worſhipping as God, a Man, who by their own Confeſſion, was rejected and ſet at naught, and at laſt Crucified as a wicked Malefactor by his own Countrymen.

Or if it can be ſuppoſed that the *Apoſtles*, by the Boldneſs of their Speech and the *inticing Words of Man's Wiſdom*, might after ſome time have prevailed upon ſome few to become Proſelytes to their Religion; yet the multitude of their Diſciples could not have been very great, before the *Government* of the Country would have taken the Alarm, and have called in Queſtion theſe *Setters forth of new Gods*, theſe *Movers of Sedition among the People*, as they would certainly have been accounted, and as, in fact, the *Apoſtles* were accounted in every place where they came. And this would quickly have put a ſtop to a growing Sect; They that liked the Religion well enough before, becauſe it was new, would quickly have left off to like it when they ſaw it would be dangerous to profeſs it; 'tis not likely their Followers would have continued to ſtick to them, when they perceiv'd the Government and the whole Nation in general engaged on the

the other ſide, and reſolved by all means poſſible to extirpate the Belief they had entertained; and when they ſaw their Preachers Impriſoned and Scourged, tortur'd and put to Death, they would quickly have deſerted the Service of a *Maſter*, who, they would then readily think, was not of Power to *ſave* either *himſelf* from the *Croſs*, or his *Diſciples* from Suffering. And after this, had the *Reſidue* of the *Apoſtles*, who might poſſibly have eſcaped Martyrdom in this Country, gone into another, there they muſt have expected the like Reception and Uſage, and not better in a third; and ſo in a few Years their Lives would have ſpun out in doing nothing, and their Religion would have periſh'd with themſelves.

And if their united Teſtimony would have had ſo little Credit, much leſs can it be ſuppoſed that the *ſingle Witneſs* of *One Apoſtle* only could ever have gain'd any Credit at all; And yet unleſs the Teſtimony of ſome ſingle Witneſſes had been believ'd, 'tis impoſſible there ſhould have been, in ſo ſhort a time, ſo great a Converſion of Men to Chriſtianity in all parts of the World, by the Preaching of ſo few Men.

So that whoever believes that Chriſtianity could make ſo ſwift and ſo great a Progreſs as 'tis certain by all Hiſtory it did, only by the *Preaching* of the *Apoſtles* without any *Miraculous Gifts* or *Supernatural Aſſiſtance*, wants not Faith enough to be a Chriſtian, if he had but a Will to it; for he believes already a much greater Miracle than any that is recorded in the *Evangelical Story*.

And now by all that hath been ſaid, in this and the laſt Diſcourſe, I hope it appears that there is *ſufficient Reaſon* to give full *Credit* to the *Authors* of the *Hiſtorical*

rical Books of the *New Teſtament* in their Relations of thoſe Matters of Fact which they have recorded. This I'm ſure I may ſay, that there is not ſo good Reaſon to give Credit to any Hiſtory in the World beſides, of the ſame Antiquity; And that a Hiſtory ſo well confirmed as this is cannot reaſonably be rejected, nor indeed any ways be diſcredited, but either by ſome other *more credible Hiſtory* contradicting it, or by ſome *intrinſick Evidence* of Falſhood.

But better or *more credible Hiſtory* contradicting it, I have already obſerv'd, there is not, nor indeed is there any Hiſtory contradicting it that is of ſufficient Antiquity to diſprove it. Nay there are many very conſiderable things of thoſe recorded in the *Goſpel-Hiſtory* that are occaſionally mentioned by other Hiſtorians of thoſe or the ſucceeding Times, who had no Deſign thereby to do any Service to Chriſtianity; as namely that there was ſuch a Man as *John the Baptiſt*, that he was a Perſon of great Piety and Auſterity, and a Preacher of Righteouſneſs, and that he was put to Death by *Herod*: That there was alſo a Man named *Jeſus*, who called himſelf and was owned by many to be the *Chriſt*, that he did many wonderful things, and was at laſt Crucified by the *Jews*: The Names of ſome other Perſons likewiſe ſpoken of in the *Goſpel-Hiſtory* are mention'd under the ſame Character in ſome other Hiſtories, as *Pilate*, *Felix*, *Feſtus*, *Caiphas*, *Agrippa*, &c. In other Hiſtories alſo we find notice taken of the Cruelty of *Herod* in ſlaying the Infants at *Bethlehem*, and among them (as 'tis thought) his own Son; which made *Auguſtus*, when the Story was told him, to ſay, that it was *better to be* Herod's *Swine than his Son*; and likewiſe

of

of that remarkable Eclipſe of the Sun, when the Moon was at the full, which the *Evangeliſts* ſay happen'd at the time of our Saviour's Paſſion; and of that violent Earthquake that was at the ſame time, and laſtly, of the prodigious Increaſe of Chriſtianity in all Parts of the *Roman* Empire, ſoon after its firſt Publication.

And if upon this Occaſion it ſhould be ſaid that the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical Hiſtory* and the Events that follow'd thereupon were ſo very wonderful and remarkable, that if they had been true they muſt in all probability have been more taken notice of than they are in other Hiſtories; I anſwer, that ſuppoſing them to be true, it could not be reaſonably expected that more mention ſhould have been made of them by other Hiſtorians than there really is; becauſe they were plainly foreign to their purpoſe, or elſe ſuch Stories as tho' they had heard of them they did not believe, having perhaps never taken any pains to examine into the Truth of them. For what was it to the Purpoſe of an Author that was writing the Life of one of the *Roman* Emperors, or the Hiſtory of ſome famous War, or giving an Account of the Affairs of the Civil State, to make a large Digreſſion concerning a *Religious Sect* begun in *Judea* by a Perſon that was *deſpiſed* in his own Country, and carried on and continued by *mean* and *contemptible* Perſons who made no Figure in the World? Or how could it be expected that an Hiſtorian who was not himſelf a *Chriſtian* ſhould yet give a large Account of the Miracles of our *Saviour* and his *Apoſtles*, and other Facts upon which our Religion is grounded; which had he believ'd (as he muſt be ſuppoſed to have done, if he had deliver'd them to Poſterity as Truths) he muſt have

have been a *Chriſtian*? 'Tis enough in all Reaſon, and as much as could be expected in this Caſe (ſuppoſing theſe Facts to be true) that they are not by any Hiſtorians that were of another Religion, contradicted or attempted to be diſprov'd; more than this would have been too much. And ſhould we now in ſome ancient Manuſcript Hiſtory new brought to Light, and bearing the Name of ſome *Jewiſh* or *Heathen* Author, find a large and formal Account of any of thoſe Facts relating to the Chriſtian Religion that are recorded in the Goſpel; this would give very juſt ground to ſuſpect, that the whole Hiſtory (whatever other Appearance it had of Truth) was forged and counterfeit, or at leaſt that thoſe Paſſages ſpeaking honourably of the Chriſtian Religion or the Author of it, were knaviſhly foiſted into the Book by ſome *Chriſtian Tranſcriber*. For this is indeed the beſt Argument that is brought to diſcredit ſome Paſſages of this kind that are now to be found in ſome *Heathen* or *Jewiſh* Hiſtorians, and particularly in *Joſephus*, *viz.* that they ſay more than was proper or likely to be ſaid by *Heathens* or *Jews*; that if thoſe Paſſages are genuine, and the Authors had believed what they themſelves wrote, they muſt have been *Chriſtians*.

Now this I'm ſure is not fair Dealing, that the *Paucity* and *ſlenderneſs* of thoſe *corroborating Teſtimonies* to the Truth of the *Chriſtian Hiſtory* that are to be met with in other Hiſtorians, and that the *Multitude* and *Fulneſs* of ſuch Teſtimonies, ſhould *both* be urged as Arguments againſt Chriſtianity. And therefore when they are both urged (as they are and have been by our Adverſaries) we may reaſonably conclude that the Truth is in the Mean; and that there are indeed

no more, nor no fewer Teſtimonies of this kind to be met with in other Writers, and that they are not either more or leſs to the Purpoſe, than (ſuppoſing the *Chriſtian Hiſtory* to be true) might fairly be expected.

It only remains then that we enquire whether there be in the *Goſpel Hiſtory*, any *intrinſick Evidences* of Falſhood. And 'tis pretended by the Adverſaries of our Religion, that there are many ſuch; For there are, they ſay, ſome things related in the *Goſpel Hiſtory*, that are altogether *incredible*; and there is, they ſay, oftentimes great *Difference*, in the ſeveral Relations of the ſame Story, by the ſeveral *Evangeliſts*; And not only ſo, but there are, they ſay, beſides, in their ſeveral Hiſtories compared together, ſome flat *Contradictions* and *Repugnancies*.

I intended therefore at the End of this Diſcourſe, if I had had time for it, to have ſpoken largely upon this Subject; But becauſe I have not, muſt referr you to thoſe Books that have been written on purpoſe to give an Account of the difficult Texts of Scripture, and to reconcile thoſe that are ſeemingly repugnant; Or for want of ſuch Books to any good Commentary on the Bible, in which you will hardly fail to meet with Satisfaction in any Difficulty of this kind, if you read it with a Mind diſpoſed to receive ſatisfaction. And I ſhall conclude this Diſcourſe with only obſerving in General,

1. That the pretended *Impoſſibilities* that are ſaid to be related in the Sacred Hiſtory, are only *Difficulties*; They are indeed Events above and beyond the known Power and common Courſe of Nature, but they are ſuch as are eaſily Credible when they are aſcribed, as they muſt be, to the Almighty power of God.

2. That

2. That the *Difference* that may ſometimes be obſerv'd in the ſeveral Relations of the ſame Story by the ſeveral *Evangeliſts*, is very inconſiderable; conſiſting only in this, That one perhaps relates the Story in a different Order of things than another does; Or that One tells it briefly, another more at large; Or One with a few, another with more Circumſtances; Or that ſome Circumſtances are mentioned by each of them which the other had omitted. So that this Obſervation is ſo far from being a juſt Objection againſt the Truth of the Hiſtory, that it is rather a Proof and Confirmation of it; For 'tis an Argument that the *Evangeliſts* did not conferr together in the Writing of their Hiſtories, and that they did not Copy or Tranſcribe from one another; but that every one of them reported the Story he wrote in ſuch manner as he himſelf remembred it to have been, and with ſuch Circumſtances as he himſelf took moſt notice of. And,

3. As to the *Repugnancies* and *Inconſiſtences* that are ſaid to be in the *Evangelical Hiſtory*; Theſe we abſolutely deny. I have not time now to conſider, or attempt to reconcile all the Places that are pretended to be contradictory to each other, but thoſe Paſſages which ſeem moſt liable to this Exception, are, I think, the Relation of *Judas*'s Death, and the Account of our Saviour's *Genealogy*.

But as to the firſt, There is plainly no *Impoſſibility*, no *Contradiction* in it, if we ſhould ſay that after he had *hanged himſelf*, as St. *Matthew* ſays, he did *fall down*, and *his* Mat. 27. 5. *Bowels guſh'd out*, as St. *Luke* affirms; Or it may be that he Acts 1. 18. did not hang himſelf, but only was * *choaked* or ſuffocated * ἀπήγξατο. by the violence of his Grief, and that the ſame Paſſion by which he was ſtrangled made him alſo *fall down headlong and burſt aſſunder in the midſt ſo that all his Bowels guſhed out*. And as to the other, when 'tis remembred that by the *Jewiſh* Law the next of Kin was to raiſe up Seed to Deut. 25. 5. his near Relation that died without Iſſue, by Marrying his Widow, and that the Firſt-born of the Woman after ſuch ſecond Marriage was reputed in *Law* the *Son*, as well as he was the *Heir*, of the *Deceaſed*; ſo that conſequently the

the ſame Perſon might be the *Legal Son* of one Man, and the *Natural Son* of another Man; tho' it may be difficult, perhaps impoſſible for us, at this Diſtance of Time, to ſay with certainty which of the two different Lines by which our Saviour's Pedigree is deduced from *David* is the *Legal*, and which the *Natural* Line; it is very eaſie nevertheleſs to believe that one is the *Legal* and that the other is the *Natural* Line; and if ſo, there is plainly no Contradiction between the two *Evangeliſts*, altho' St. *Matthew* makes our Saviour to be deſcended from *Solomon*, and St. *Luke* from *Nathan*, altho' St. *Matthew* ſays that *Joſeph* the Husband of the Bleſſed Virgin was the Son of *Jacob*, and St. *Luke* that he was the Son of *Heli*.

Mat. 1. 16.

Luke 3. 23.

And now the *Truth* of the *Goſpel Hiſtory* being, as I hope, by what hath been ſaid *ſufficiently eſtabliſhed*, I ſhould proceed to ſhew, That if the Matters of Fact related in the New Teſtament are true, *they* are *ſufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein Taught; But I am ſenſible that I have treſpaſſed too much upon your Patience already, and ſo ſhall reſerve this for the Subject of my next Diſcourſe.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

IN Sermon III. *Page* 25. *Line* 1. for *once*, read *now*, for *thoſe*, read *theſe*.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Three remaining *Lectures* for this Year are to be at St. *Paul's*, on the firſt *Mondays* in *September*, *October*, and *November*. But the firſt *Monday* in *September* being the *Faſt-Day* for the *Fire* of *London*, when there will be, in the *Morning*, a Sermon, ſuitable to that Occaſion, Preached before the *Lord Mayor*, *Aldermen*, and *Companies* of the *City*; Mr. *Boyle's Lecture* on that Day, is Order'd to be Preached in the *Afternoon*.